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Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs



# Disability and Development Report 2024

Accelerating the realization  
of the Sustainable Development  
Goals by, for and with persons  
with disabilities

Advance Unedited Version



Photo Credit: UNDP Afghanistan

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

# **Disability and Development Report 2024**

Accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals  
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United Nations

## Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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## **Reducing all forms of violence and ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children (targets 16.1 and 16.2)**

This section will focus on the first two targets of Goal 16: target 16.1, which calls for reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere, and target 16.2, which calls for ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. For persons with disabilities, achieving these two targets is in line with article 16 of the CRPD, which specifies that States Parties should take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2475 called upon Member States to protect persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, including to prevent violence and abuse.

Broad protections from violence against women and children, including against women and children with disabilities, have been established in various frameworks. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, has called for action to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) has highlighted the importance of the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Trafficking in Persons Protocol), adopted in 2000, called for prevention and protection of women and children from trafficking. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, in article 7, paragraph 1(g), classifies rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, as crimes against humanity.

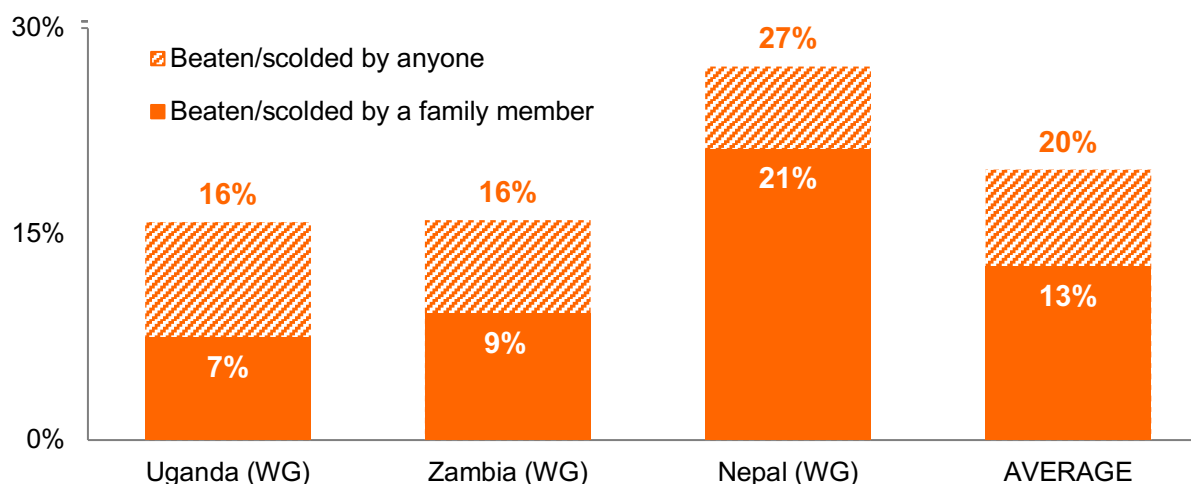
Persons with disabilities of all ages are at an increased risk of violence due to stigma and discrimination, exclusion from education and employment, communication barriers and a lack of social support. This section will present recent data and trends on the prevalence of violence among persons with disabilities and children with disabilities, as well initiatives and actions taken worldwide to prevent this violence. On the basis of this evidence, it will conclude with recommendations for action to ending violence, abuse exploitation and trafficking against persons with disabilities.

### **Current situation and progress so far**

Persons with disabilities of all ages and genders suffer higher rates of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence. Data from three developing countries (Figure 195) indicates that, on average, 20 per cent of

persons with disabilities are beaten and scolded because of their disabilities, often by a family member (13 per cent), from 16 per cent of persons with disabilities in Uganda and Zambia to 27 per cent in Nepal suffering this type of violence. In Nepal, more than three quarters of persons with disabilities who have been beaten or scolded indicated that the perpetrator was a family member; in Uganda and Zambia, about half of them indicated this.

**Figure 195. Percentage of persons with disabilities who have ever been beaten or scolded because of their disability, in 3 countries, in 2018 or latest year available.**



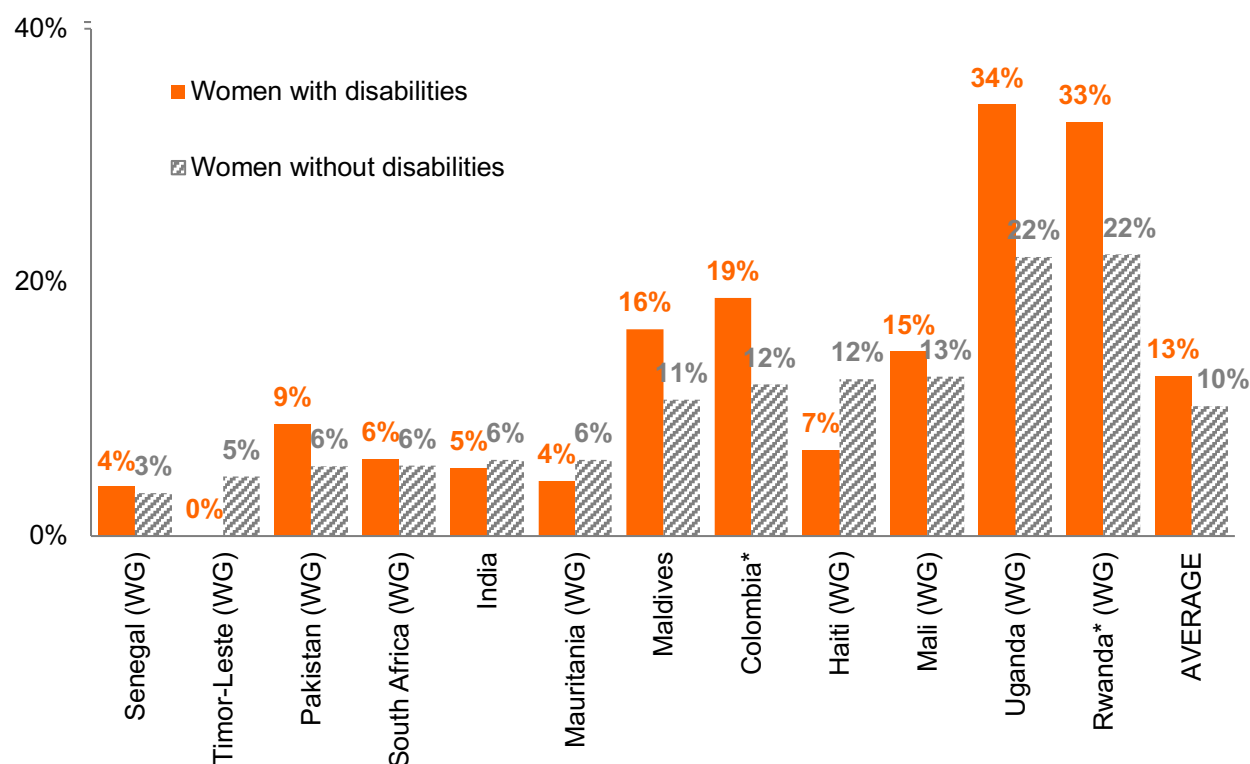
*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

Data from 12 developing countries (Figure 196) indicates that, on average, 13 per cent of women with disabilities compared to 10 per cent of women without disabilities have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. In Rwanda and Uganda, more than 30 per cent of women with disabilities have suffered sexual violence, and in Colombia and the Maldives more than 15 per cent.

In Uganda, men with disabilities were almost three times more likely to have ever been victims of sexual violence than men without disabilities: 21 per cent of men with disabilities versus 8 per cent of men without disabilities (Figure 197). In Rwanda, 8 per cent of adult men with disabilities suffered sexual violence compared to 5 per cent of men without disabilities. By contrast, the percentage of women with disabilities aged 15 to 49 who experienced sexual violence in these two countries is much higher, at 33-34 per cent, indicating that sexual violence is much more common against women with disabilities than against men with disabilities. Sexual violence can occur at home, in institutions, schools, health centres and other public and private facilities. Perpetrators are frequently relatives, caregivers and professionals on whom the girl or woman with disabilities may depend on, such as medical staff (see chapter on targets 3.7 and 5.6).

**Figure 196. Percentage of women aged 15 to 49 who have suffered sexual violence, at least once in their lifetime, by disability status, in 12 countries, in 2021 or latest year available.**

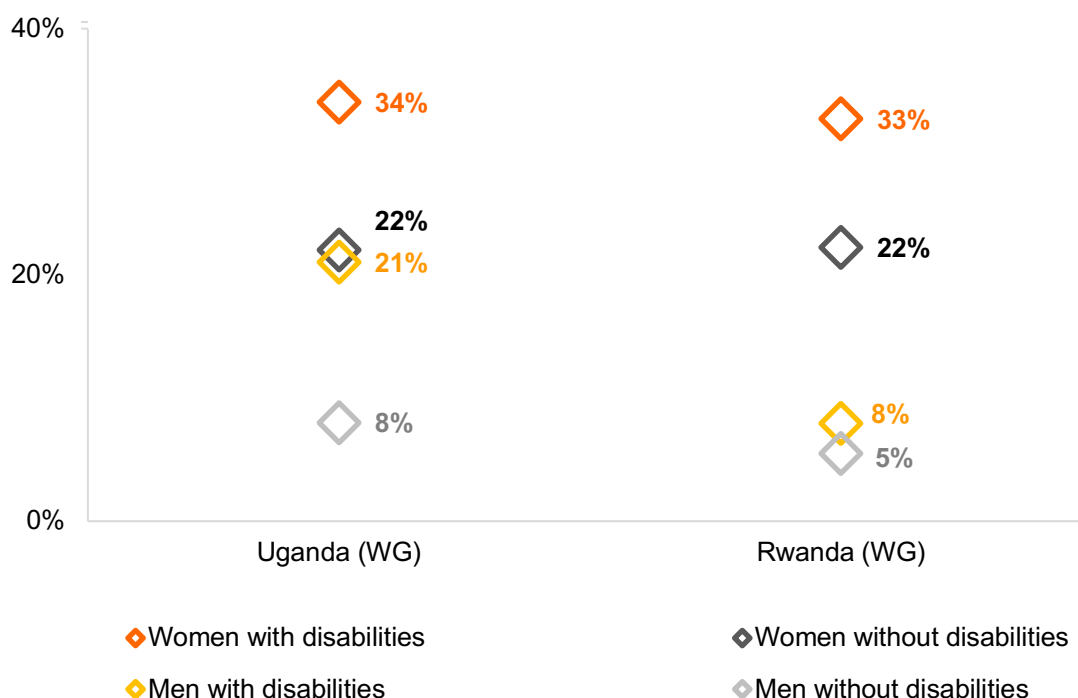


*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the difference between women with and without disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5%. Data for women with disabilities from Mali, Senegal and Timor-Leste are based on 25 to 49 observations and should be interpreted with caution.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from DHS<sup>6</sup>).*

Girls and women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by other forms of violence, including forced sterilizations and invasive and irreversible involuntary medical treatments, forced abortion, forced pregnancy, forced menstrual suppression, forced pregnancy prevention, criminalization of abortion, denial or delay of safe abortion and post-abortion care, forced continuation of pregnancy, abuse and mistreatment of women and girls seeking sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services; as well as female genital mutilation (see chapter on targets 3.7 and 5.6).

**Figure 197. Percentage of persons aged 15 to 49 who have suffered sexual violence, at least once in their lifetime, by disability status and sex, in Rwanda and Uganda, in 2020 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data collected with the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

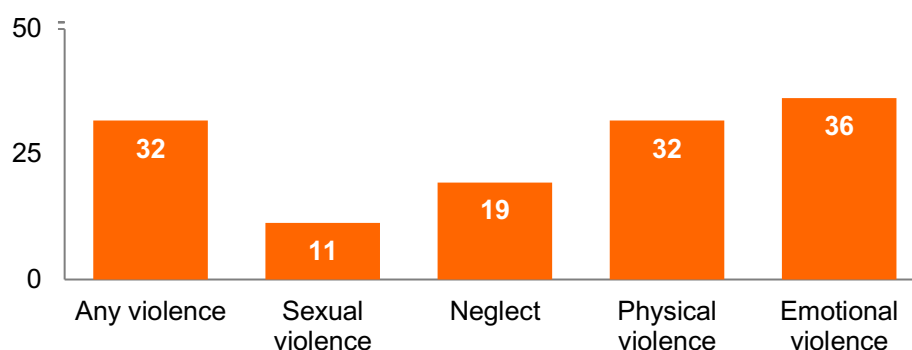
*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from DHS<sup>6</sup>).*

Violence against children with disabilities can take various forms, including physical, sexual and emotional violence and neglect. It can be perpetrated by caregivers, authority figures (e.g., teachers or other service providers), other adults, other children or by intimate partners during adolescence. Among 26 countries or areas worldwide, 32 per cent of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 experience violence, and children with disabilities are more than twice as likely to experience violence than children without disabilities.<sup>508</sup> Emotional and physical violence are the most common forms of violence against children with disabilities, with 36 per cent of children with disabilities suffering emotional violence and 32 per cent of children with disabilities suffering physical violence (Figure 198). Moreover, 19 per cent of children with disabilities suffer neglect and 11 per cent of children with disabilities suffer sexual violence.

The most common perpetrator is a peer through in-person bullying, with 37 per cent of children with disabilities experiencing this violence – children with disabilities are 2 times more likely to experience this type of violence than children without disabilities (Figure 199). Other perpetrators include adults committing maltreatment, which affects 27 per cent of children with disabilities – children with disabilities are 2 times more likely to experience this type of violence than children without disabilities – and their

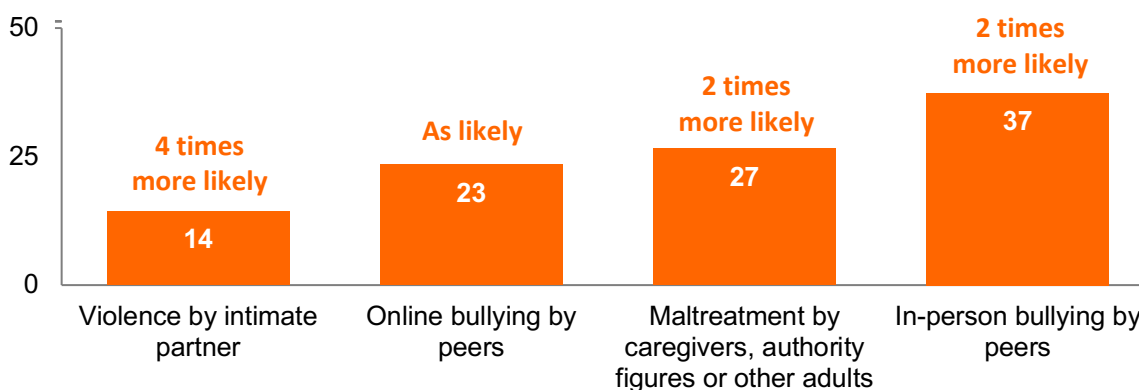
intimate partners during adolescence, with 14 per cent of children with disabilities suffering this violence – children with disabilities are 4 times more likely to experience this type of violence than children without disabilities. Online bullying by peers affects 27 per cent of children with disabilities – children with disabilities are as likely to experience this type of violence as children without disabilities.

**Figure 198. Percentage of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 who suffered violence, by type of violence, in 2020 or latest year available.**



Source: Fang et al. (2022).<sup>508</sup>

**Figure 199. Percentage of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 who suffered violence, by type of perpetrator, and comparison with children without disabilities, in 2020 or latest year available.**

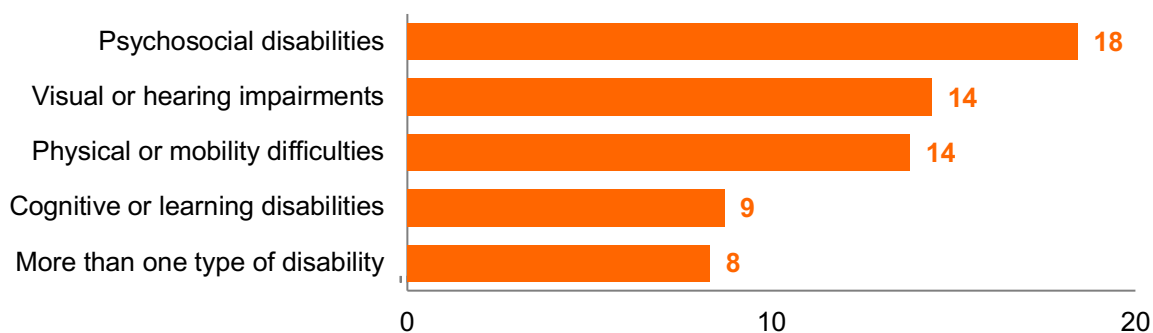


Source: Fang et al. (2022).<sup>508</sup>

Children with psychosocial disabilities (18 per cent) and children with visual, hearing, physical and mobilities impairments (14 per cent) have a higher prevalence of sexual violence than children with cognitive or learning disabilities (9 per cent) or children with more than one type of disability (8 per cent) – see Figure 200.

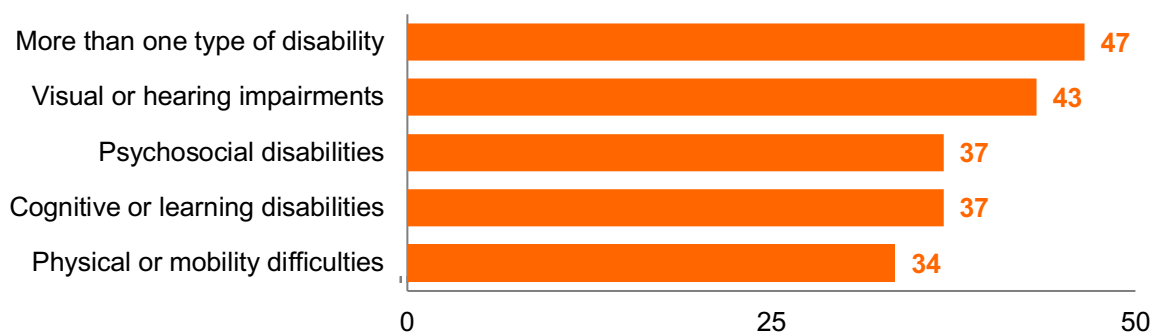


**Figure 200. Percentage of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 who suffered sexual violence, by type of disability, in 2020 or latest year available.**



Source: Fang et al. (2022).<sup>508</sup>

**Figure 201. Percentage of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 who suffered in-person or online peer bullying, by type of disability, in 2020 or latest year available.**

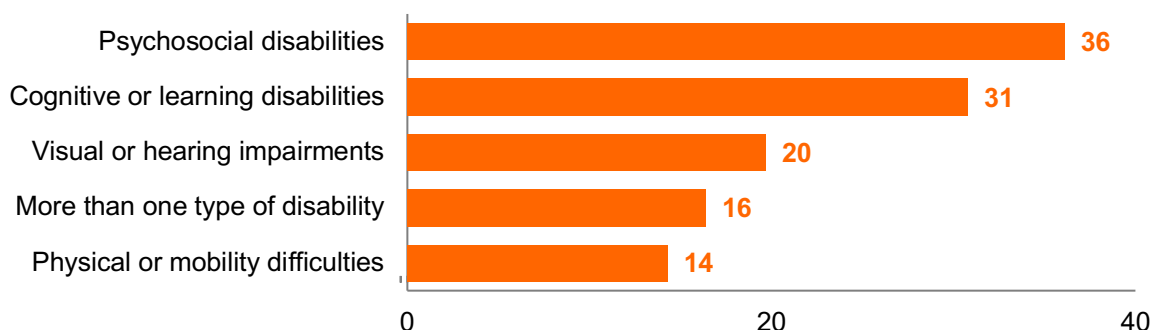


Source: Fang et al. (2022).<sup>508</sup>

Children with more than one type of disability (47 per cent) and children with visual or hearing impairments (43 per cent) have a higher prevalence of peer bullying than children with psychosocial, cognitive or learning disabilities (37 per cent) or children with physical or mobility difficulties (34 per cent) – see Figure 201.

Children with psychosocial disabilities (36 per cent) and children with cognitive or learning disabilities (31 per cent) have a higher prevalence of maltreatment by adults than children with visual or hearing impairments (20 per cent), children with multiple disabilities (16 per cent) or children with physical or mobility difficulties (14 per cent) – see Figure 202.

**Figure 202. Percentage of children with disabilities aged 0 to 18 who suffered maltreatment by adults, by type of disability, in 2020 or latest year available.**

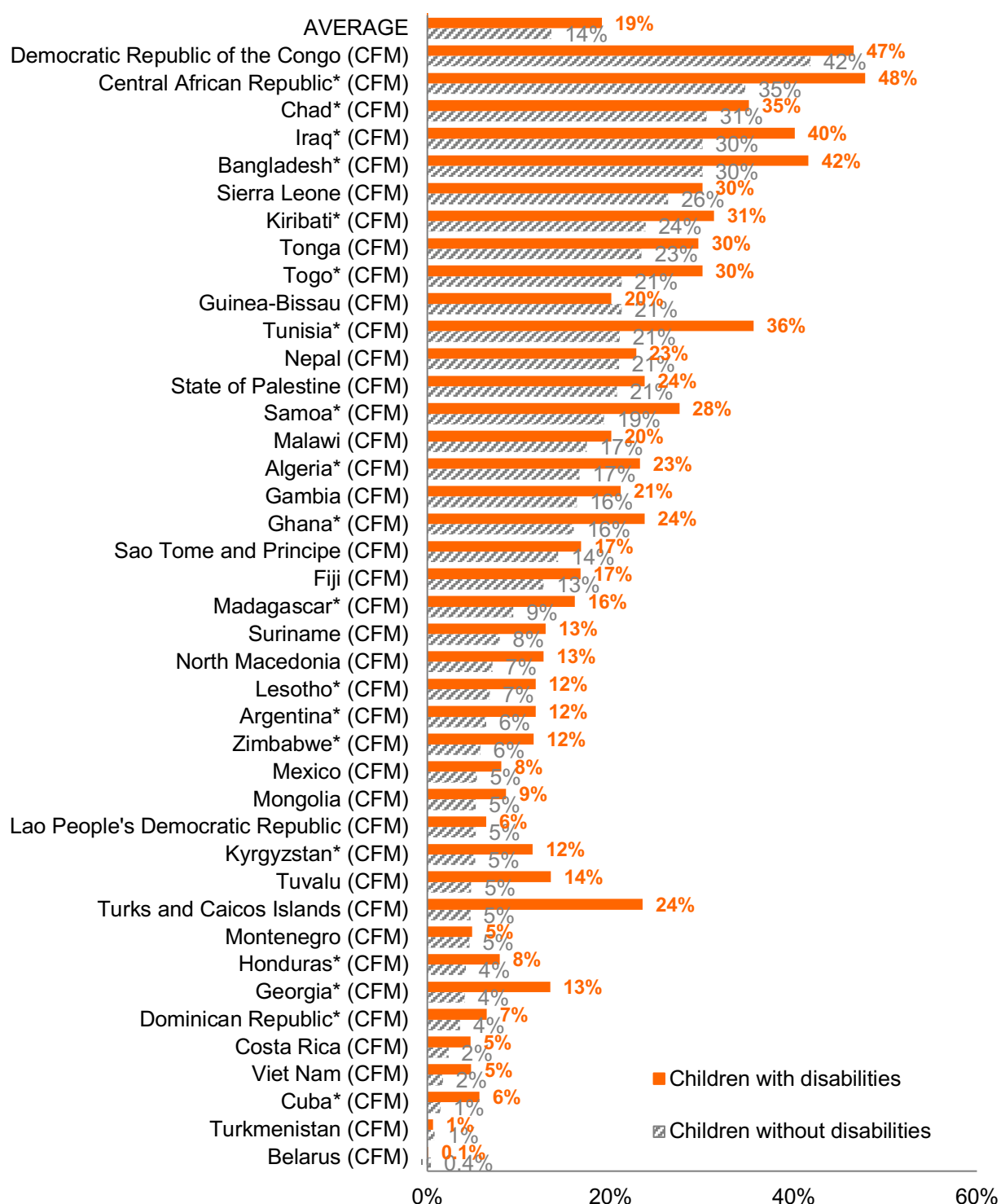


Source: Fang *et al.* (2022).<sup>508</sup>

Indicator 16.2.1 monitors the proportion of children who experience any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month. Children with disabilities are more likely than children without disabilities to experience severe physical punishment by caregivers. Data from 41 countries or areas shows that severe physical punishment is more likely to be meted out by caregivers on children with disabilities in 38 of these countries (Figure 203). On average, 19 per cent of children with disabilities compared to 14 per cent of children without disabilities experience severe punishment by their caregivers. In some countries, the prevalence of severe punishment among children with disabilities is much higher and the disparities vis-à-vis children without disabilities are much wider. In Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq, more than 40 per cent of children with disabilities suffer severe punishment from their caregivers. In Cuba, Georgia and Turks and Caicos, children with disabilities are more than 3 times as likely to be victims of severe punishment by their caregivers than children without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. Perpetrators use force, fraud, abduction, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability and coercion to hold victims with disabilities in exploitation. Perpetrators include family members, friends and strangers. Children and adults with disabilities are also at risk for human trafficking in residential institutions and orphanages that allow traffickers, which may include staff, to operate in or around the premises with impunity.

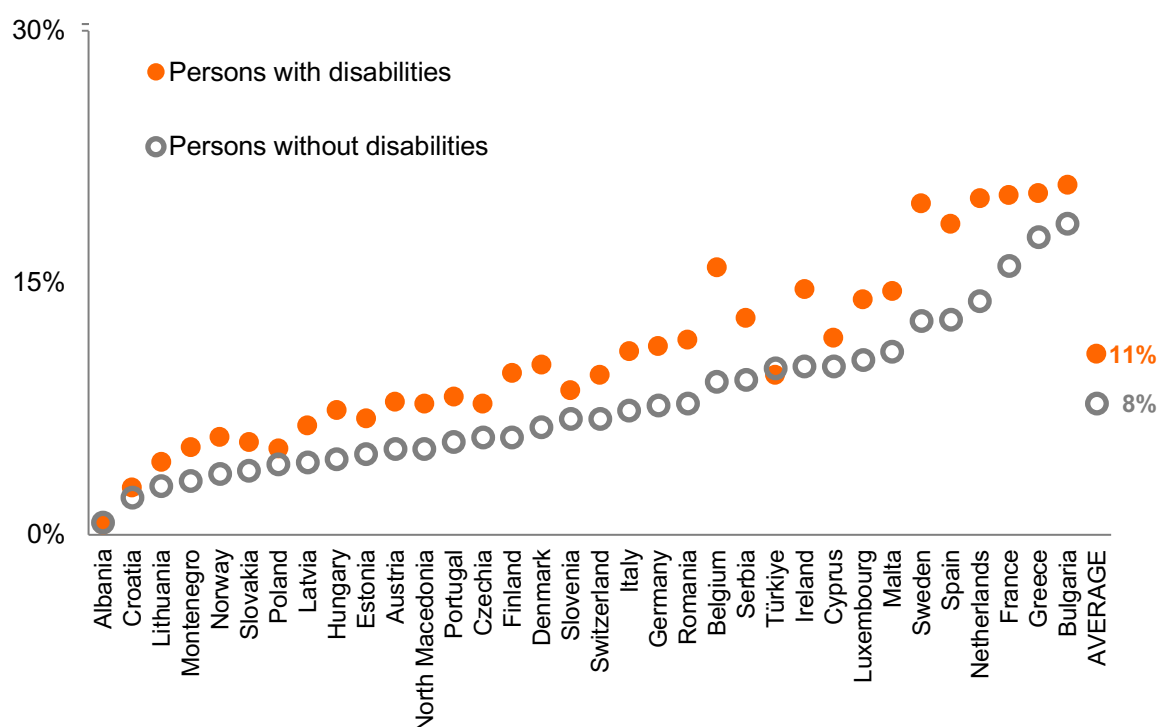
**Figure 203. Percentage of children aged 2 to 14 years who experienced severe physical punishment by caregivers in the past month, by disability status, in 41 countries or areas, in 2021 or latest year available (indicator 16.2.1).**



Source: UNICEF (on the basis of data from MICS 6).

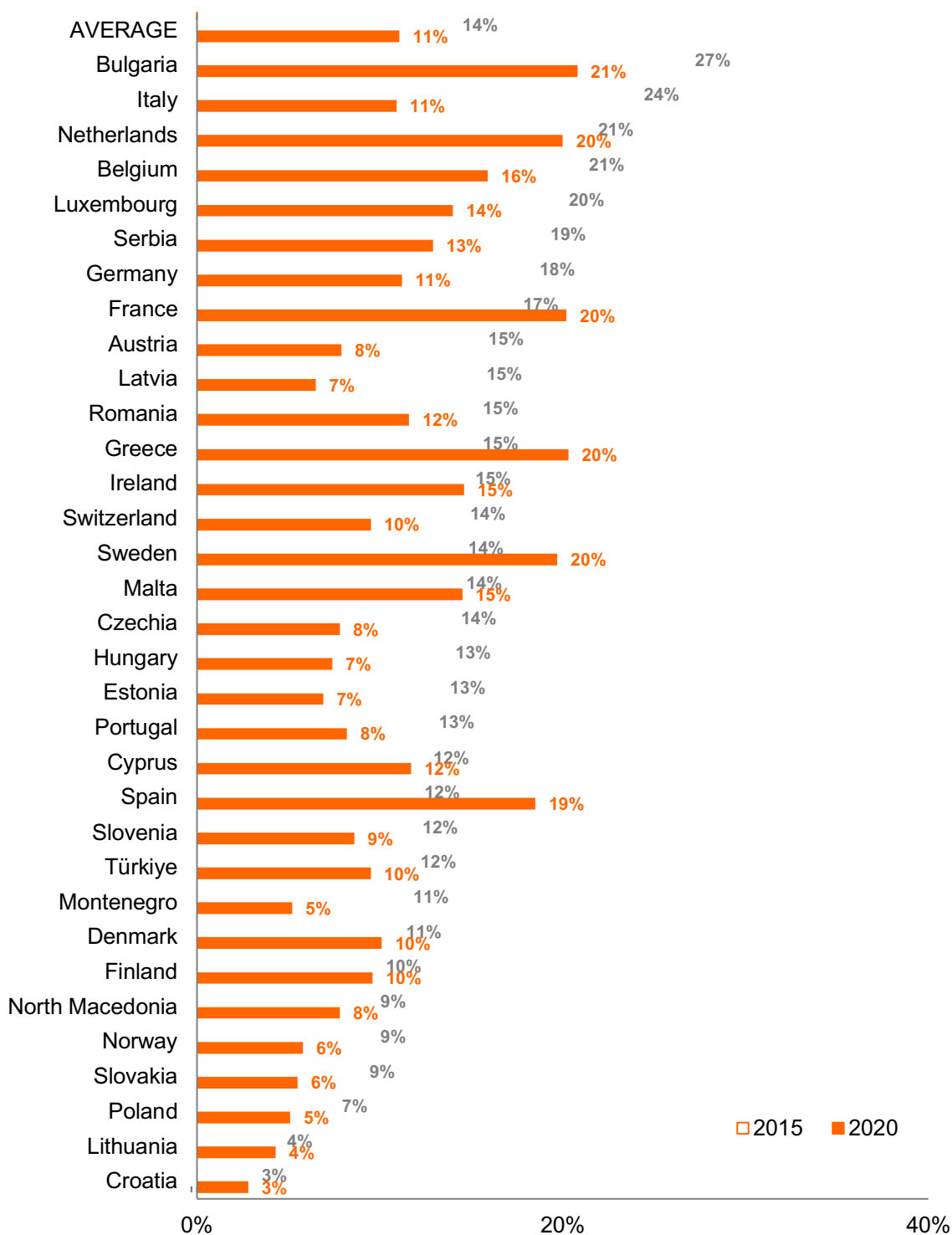
Victims with disabilities have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, forced participation in armed conflict, organ removal and the theft of their disability benefits.<sup>509,510,511</sup> Recent research points to the existence of intra-national and cross-national networks of trafficking for forced begging and sexual exploitation of deaf persons in western Africa, particularly of deaf women and girls.<sup>512</sup> Human trafficking of persons with disabilities has also been reported in Austria, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Hungary, Iraq, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Tanzania and Vietnam.<sup>513</sup> In the United States, 12 per cent of girls with severe physical disabilities and 10 per cent of girls with cognitive disabilities have experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation; girls with severe physical disabilities are 6 times more likely to experience this type of trafficking than girls without disabilities and girls with cognitive disabilities are 5 times more likely to experience this trafficking than girls without disabilities.<sup>514</sup>

**Figure 204. Percentage of persons who report that crime, violence and vandalism are common in their accommodation or area of residence, by disability status, in 34 countries, in 2020.**



Source: Eurostat.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 205. Trend in the percentage of persons with disabilities who report that crime, violence and vandalism are common in their accommodation or area of residence, in 34 countries, from 2015 to 2020.**

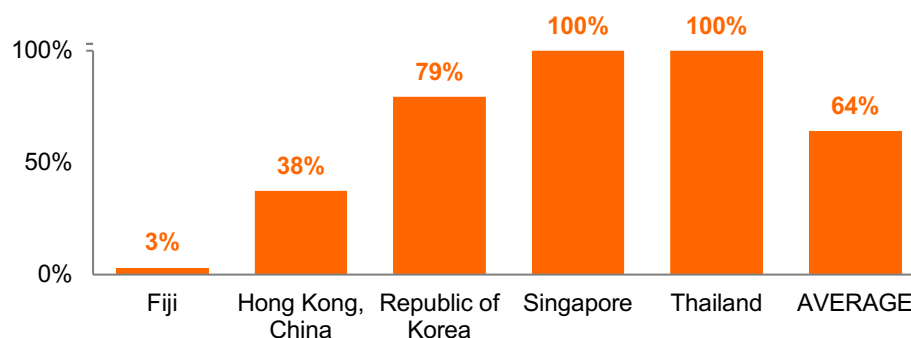


Source: Eurostat.<sup>7</sup>

Indicator 16.1.4 monitors the proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark. Persons with disabilities face barriers securing housing (see chapter on Goal 11) and may end up in less safe neighbourhoods as a result. In 34 countries, mostly in Europe, a higher percentage of persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities reports that crime, violence and vandalism are common in their accommodation or area of residence (Figure 204). On average, 11 per cent of persons with disabilities versus 8 per cent of persons without disabilities report this. In two countries, Belgium and Sweden, the gap between the percentage of persons with and without disabilities experiencing this violent environment is 7 percentage points, the widest gap observed among these 34 countries. Since 2015, there has been progress: from 14 per cent in 2015 to 11 per cent in 2021 (Figure 205). However, this progress was uneven across Europe, and in 4 countries – France, Greece, Spain and Sweden – the percentage of persons with disabilities experiencing living in such violent environments increased in 2020 to levels about 3 to 7 percentage points higher than in 2015.

Available evidence also suggests that persons with disabilities are at higher risk of suffering property crimes, such as burglaries, online banking frauds and payment card frauds. In the European Union, 15 per cent of persons with severe disabilities experienced burglary in 2019 or in the five preceding years, compared with 7 per cent of persons without severe disabilities; 14 per cent of persons with disabilities experienced online banking or payment card fraud, compared with 6 per cent of persons without disabilities.<sup>515</sup> Persons with disabilities also experienced consumer fraud<sup>516</sup> at a higher rate (36 per cent) than persons without disabilities (23 per cent).<sup>515</sup>

**Figure 206. Percentage of emergency shelters that are accessible for persons with disabilities, in 5 countries/areas in Asia and the Pacific, in 2021 or latest year available.**



Source: ESCAP.<sup>14</sup>

Countries have taken a number of initiatives to reduce abuse and violence against persons with disabilities and support victims with disabilities, such as enhancing access to justice by persons with disabilities (see section on SDG target 16.3) and putting in place mandatory mechanisms of reporting violence against persons with disabilities. For example, in Brazil, health services and authorities are

obliged to notify in the public health surveillance system all cases of violence against persons with disabilities that reach them.<sup>517</sup> Countries have also invested in services that can assist victims with disabilities, including the provision of accessible emergency numbers, accessible shelters and services to support victims with disabilities. In 2023, 58 per cent of countries had an emergency number accessible to persons with disabilities.<sup>518</sup> For example, Lithuania launched an emergency call mobile application enabling persons with hearing disabilities to connect with real-time video with on-call sign language interpreters and text communication. In 2023, 59 per cent of countries made shelters accessible and 82 per cent of these countries consulted with persons with disabilities in developing these accessible shelters.<sup>518</sup> However, the percentage of shelters that are accessible can vary widely from country to country. In 5 countries/territories in Asia and the Pacific, this percentage varies from 3 to 100 per cent (Figure 206).

In 2023, among 27 countries, 74 per cent provided mental health and psychosocial support to persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including to victims of violence. Most of these countries (84 per cent) developed these services in consultation with persons with disabilities.<sup>518</sup> In Asia and the Pacific, at least 22 countries have programmes aiming at eliminating violence against women and girls with disabilities; 82 per cent of these countries also have programmes providing support for women and girls with disabilities who are survivors of violence and abuse.<sup>14</sup>

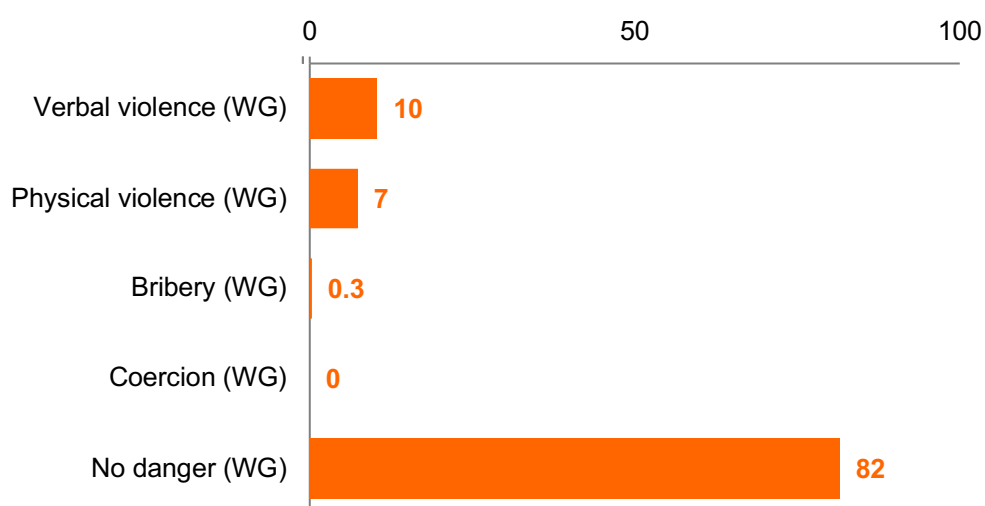
Persons with disabilities are still often left out during decision-making on measures to build and ensure sustainable peace, although very often they face the worst impact of armed conflict, including death. Although quantitative data on the number of conflict-related deaths of persons with disabilities (indicator 16.1.2) is not available, numerous reports exist of persons with disabilities being left behind during armed conflict, at times abandoned in institutions or facing death when barriers prevent them to evacuate. There are also reports of persons with disabilities being coerced by terrorist groups to participate in suicide attacks. Even when persons with disabilities manage to escape, they continue to be at higher risk of violence. For example, in the protection of civilians site in Malakal (South Sudan) which harbours internally displaced persons, many persons with disabilities encounter violence and other dangers when accessing services: 10 per cent encounter verbal violence, 7 per cent physical violence, 0.3 per cent encountered bribery (Figure 207). The episodes of physical and verbal violence include harassment from their neighbours as well as incidents of children pelting persons with disabilities with stones and insulting their disabilities.

Yet, despite the disproportionate negative impacts of armed conflict on persons with disabilities, the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities are often disregarded during conflict and not adequately considered in military operations<sup>519</sup> nor in the post-conflict phase. For example, the rights of persons with disabilities were only mentioned in 118 out of 1789 peace agreements from 1990 to 2019.<sup>520</sup>

During the past 5 years, there has been a substantial increase in the volume of available data on violence against persons with disabilities and children with disabilities, particularly through national surveys and

dedicated research studies. Compared to the data available for the United Nations Disability and Development Report 2018, internationally comparable data is now available for a larger number of countries and for a wider range of forms of violence. Yet, for many forms of violence, data remains available only for a small number of countries and there is no data available to allow assessment of trends over time. Moreover, there is limited research and data available on the trafficking of adults and children with disabilities, including a lack of data on the role of organized crime in the trafficking of persons with disabilities, though existing research indicates this is an urgent concern and a widespread global issue.

**Figure 207. Percentage of internally displaced persons with disabilities fleeing an armed conflict who encountered violence, bribery and coercion when accessing services, in the Malakal protection of civilians site (South Sudan), in 2020.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

*Source: International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (2021).<sup>521</sup>*

Existing data sources are likely to underestimate the prevalence of violence among persons with disabilities and among children with disabilities. First, many victims may be unwilling to report violence for fear of stigma or retaliation. Secondly, surveys and research studies tend to only include children/adults with disabilities who are alive, thus excluding counts of severe violence that may have led to death. Administrative sources such as public health surveillance systems and police and court records have been used to estimate the prevalence of violence among persons with disabilities (e.g., in Brazil<sup>522</sup> and the United States<sup>523</sup>) – these approaches tend to produce lower estimates because they only capture instances of violence that reached health services, courts, the police or other national authorities, but they may be able to capture cases of extreme violence not captured by official or academic surveys.



## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already increased risk for violence and abuse against persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities worldwide, including women and girls with disabilities, faced increased risk factors for violence and increased barriers to access help, support, police and justice. As persons with disabilities were confined at home and lost their usual systems of support, they were at higher risk of physical, sexual, emotional and psychological violence against them. Victims of violence may have been less likely to report the violence when they were locked down at home with their abusers. They may have relied on the perpetrator for care and assistance; and feared retaliation and other negative consequences if abuse was reported or if they sought help.

During the pandemic, police resources were often focused on enforcing COVID-19 restrictions and may have been re-allocated away from investigating violence, including gender-based violence. Justice mechanisms also moved more slowly in some contexts, leading to potential impunity for perpetrators. Many persons with disabilities lost financial resources and earnings during the pandemic, which made them more vulnerable and impacted their ability to fully exercise their right to be free from violence.

In the middle of the pandemic, violence in the home was reported at a higher rate in households with parents/caregivers or children with disabilities. Across the world, a higher proportion of parents/caregivers with disabilities (26 per cent) reported violence in the home than parents/caregivers without disabilities (19 per cent); female parents/caregivers with disabilities (31 per cent) were most likely to report violence in the home, compared to male parents/caregivers with disabilities (19 per cent), female parents/caregivers without disabilities (19 per cent) and male parents/caregivers without disabilities (17 per cent); and 43 per cent of children with disabilities reported violence at home, compared to 15 per cent of children without disabilities.<sup>16</sup>

When looking for relief from violence in their homes, persons with disabilities more frequently reported barriers to accessing domestic violence services as these services became harder to access due to lockdown measures. More than one in ten parents/caregivers with disabilities (12 per cent) reported needing, but not being able to access, domestic violence services, compared to 4 per cent of parents/caregivers without disabilities.<sup>16</sup> Female parents/caregivers with disabilities were more likely to report an unmet need to access domestic violence services (14 per cent), compared to male caregivers with disabilities (11 per cent).<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, during the pandemic, 40 per cent of persons with disabilities felt more vulnerable and more at risk of crime, compared to pre-pandemic times.<sup>524</sup> They perceived that higher unemployment had generated more crime in their areas of residence.

## Summary of findings and the way forward

Persons with disabilities, particularly children, women and persons with psychosocial disabilities, are more likely than persons without disabilities to suffer violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking. Existing evidence indicates this is a severe global issue, affecting all regions in the world. Perpetrators of violence against persons with disabilities include family members, caregivers, guardians, friends, teachers, staff from health and other services as well as strangers.

In some countries, more than 1 in six persons with disabilities are beaten or scolded because of their disabilities; more than 1 in 3 women with disabilities suffer sexual violence; more than 1 in 12 men with disabilities suffer sexual violence; more than 1 in 2 children suffer severe punishment from their caregivers. Global estimates point to 1 in every 3 children with disabilities suffering neglect, sexual, physical or emotional violence – they are twice as likely to encounter such violence than their peers without disabilities. The most common form of violence encountered by children with disabilities is in-person bullying by peers (37 per cent of children with disabilities are victims of this form of violence). Children with psychosocial disabilities suffer the highest prevalence of sexual violence (18 per cent of these children) and maltreatment by adults (36 per cent of these children). Children with multiple disabilities suffer the highest prevalence of in-person and online bullying (47 per cent of these children).

Barriers in the achievement of other Goals and targets -- including in ending poverty and eliminating discrimination, and promoting education, employment and housing -- cause barriers for persons with disabilities to exercise their right to be free from violence and to achieve targets 16.1 and 16.2. Barriers to housing, in particular, push persons with disabilities into unsafe accommodation and neighbourhoods where crime, violence and vandalism are common. In Europe, 11 per cent of persons with disabilities compared to 8 per cent of persons without disabilities live in such accommodation/neighbourhoods.

Limited data shows the existence but impedes an assessment of the extent of human trafficking of children and adults with disabilities. Recent reports and research indicate this is an urgent concern affecting countries in all regions of the world. The evidence points to existing intra-national and cross-national trafficking of children and adults with disabilities for forced begging, sexual exploitation, forced labour, organ removal, forced participation in armed conflict and theft of their disability benefits.

On all but one form of violence analysed in this chapter, persons with disabilities are more likely – for some forms of violence 2 to 6 times more likely – to suffer that violence than others: this includes emotional, physical and sexual violence, peer bullying, human trafficking, neglect and severe physical punishment by caregivers. The one exception is online bullying, for which children with disabilities are as likely to be targeted children without disabilities.

Measures taken by countries to protect persons with disabilities from violence tend to focus on facilitating the reporting and legal prosecution of violence against persons with disabilities and on creating accessible services supporting victims of violence. In 2023, 58 per cent of countries had emergency

numbers accessible to persons with disabilities; 59 per cent had shelters accessible to persons with disabilities; and 74 per cent provided mental health and psychological support services to victims with disabilities.

The following recommendations offer guidance on how to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against persons with disabilities:

**1. Raise awareness and provide training, on combating violence against persons with disabilities, among families and parent groups, the justice system, teachers and educational staff, service providers, policymakers and legislators.**

Public awareness and advocacy campaigns need to be targeted at changing mindsets and social norms directed at persons with disabilities, especially children with disabilities, and at promoting the elimination of discriminatory practices. Offer training to service providers so that they can identify cases of violence against persons with disabilities and provide adequate support to victims with disabilities. The capacity of service providers to support victims with disabilities should be strengthened to enhance the quality of services. Countries should provide training on disability and women's rights to all stakeholders involved in addressing violence, including those involved in early detection, protection and referral of victims of violence. This should include training of health officials, law enforcement, labour inspectors and judicial officials in the identification and respectful treatment of victims with disabilities. They should provide training for practitioners, including with the objective to combat stereotypes and myths surrounding gender and disability that may affect access to justice, especially of women and girls with disabilities.

**2. Offer trainings for persons with disabilities to enhance their knowledge of their rights and their skills to keep safe and to present themselves at police stations and in courts in the event of violence.**

All training and information should be provided in formats accessible to persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and their representative organizations should be involved in the development and implementation of these trainings.

**3. Establish mechanisms to report violence which are accessible for persons with disabilities and ensure that persons with disabilities have access to justice.**

Provide appropriate and sufficient support to report violence. Accessible formats, sign language interpreters, support services for victims with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities should be established. Make national emergency numbers accessible for all persons with disabilities. Ensure equal protection of the law and equality before the law for persons with disabilities, by ensuring non-discrimination on the basis of disability (see chapter on target 16.3). Facilitate the participation of trafficked persons with disabilities in all legal proceedings through inclusive measures.

**4. Make shelters and other services for victims of violence accessible to persons with disabilities.**

Shelters and victim support services should be fully accessible to persons with disabilities and provide appropriate attention and protection services, including supported decision making when needed. Countries should also ensure full accessibility within the justice system. Countries should conduct an

evaluation of the accessibility for persons with disabilities of the current justice system, emergency numbers, shelters, other services and information aimed at victims of violence to ensure they fully meet the needs of victims with disabilities. Current barriers should be removed gradually in a systematic and continuously monitored manner, with the aim of achieving full accessibility. Persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and their representative organizations should be involved in the monitoring and implementation of accessibility features.

**5. Address the conditions that make persons with disabilities more vulnerable to violence.**

Accelerate progress on ending poverty among persons with disabilities, increasing their education levels and employment, eliminating barriers to housing and to independent living and ending stigma and all discriminatory practices. Fully ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are realized, in particular their rights to equality and non-discrimination, education, work and employment, equal recognition before the law and legal capacity, liberty and security, living independently and being included in the community, and an adequate standard of living, to avoid placing them at higher risks of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

**6. Design and implement targeted policies and programmes to address the high levels of violence against persons with disabilities, especially against women and girls with disabilities.**

The observed high prevalence of violence against persons with disabilities – much higher than among persons without disabilities -- and the particular barriers that persons with disabilities face, including stigma and discrimination and their higher risk of poverty, require targeted actions specifically designed to eliminate violence against persons with disabilities. Broad general programs directed at the overall population are unlikely to succeed in eliminating violence against persons with disabilities. Policies and programmes should take into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities and include a gender perspective. Targeted actions to eliminate violence against women and girls with disabilities may also be needed – they face higher levels of violence than men and boys with disabilities. Ending violence will also require adequate interventions to combat violence by any type of perpetrator, including family members, caregivers, relatives, friends, service providers and strangers. Persons with disabilities often depend on family members, caregivers and service providers and may not be able to report this type of violence. Actions should be developed to speedily identify such cases of violence and addressing them. Persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and their representative organizations should be involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of prevention and response measures, policies and programmes to combat violence against persons with disabilities.

**7. Promote multi-country collaboration and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including representative organizations of persons with disabilities, to end intra-national and cross-national human trafficking of children and adults with disabilities.**

Combat intra-national and cross-national networks of trafficking of children and adults with disabilities as well as isolated cases of trafficking. Address the conditions that make persons with disabilities vulnerable to trafficking, especially poverty,

which may lead families and caregivers to give or sell children and adults with disabilities away to human traffickers. Provide support to documented and undocumented victims of trafficking who were moved away from their countries of citizenship or residency. Establish cross-border collaborations to avoid impunity of traffickers crossing borders.

**8. Improve availability and quality of data and research on violence against persons with disabilities, especially against children with disabilities as well as against women and girls with disabilities.** Up-to-date evidence is essential to understand the extent of violence, its causes and to design effective policies to end violence. Violence against persons with disabilities and children with disabilities varies by type of disability and by gender: data should be disaggregated by these characteristics as well as age. More data and research is needed to understand regional variations of violence against persons with disabilities (urban/rural as well as in different continents and sub-continents), violence by income level of the victim with disabilities, extent of human trafficking and trends of all forms of violence over time. A more comprehensive assessment of the prevalence of violence among persons with disabilities may be obtained by developing methods to combine data from various sources to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the incidence of violence among persons with disabilities; currently, there is a lack of methods to combine data produced by official or academic population surveys with data from administrative records such as public health surveillance systems and police and court records. There is also a need for research on the effectiveness of existing interventions to further inform policy and practice. All research and data should be made available in formats accessible to persons with disabilities, including in easy-to-understand formats. Persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and their representative organizations should be involved in the development of data and research.

## Ensuring equal access to justice (target 16.3)

This section reflects on the achievement of target 16.3 by, for and with persons with disabilities, in line with the CRPD. This target calls for ensuring equal access to justice for all. Article 13 of the CRPD requires States Parties to ensure effective access to justice for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others, including through the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations in all legal proceedings; and calls for the promotion of appropriate training for those working in the administration of justice. Article 12 of the CRPD reaffirms that persons with disabilities have the right of recognition everywhere as persons before the law, guarantees the right to legal capacity for persons with disabilities, and requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to provide access by persons with disabilities to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity. The principles enshrined in Articles 12 and 13 of the CRPD, as interpreted by the Committee of the CRPD in its concluding observations, have been developed into an international set of principles and standards by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2020.<sup>525</sup>

This section will address access to justice as it relates to persons with disabilities. It will give an overview of the current situation and progress so far, highlight good practices and end with recommendations to ensure access to justice for all persons with disabilities.

## Current situation and progress so far

Many barriers persist for persons with disabilities to access justice. One of these barriers is the persistence of guardianships and substituted decision-making in many countries, instead of supported decision making (Box 9). With guardianships and substituted decision-making, the legal capacity of persons with disabilities is not recognized and another person is allowed to have the legal authority to make decisions on their behalf. Those most affected are persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, persons who are deaf or blind, persons with hearing impairments, persons with autism, persons with dementia, women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities.<sup>526</sup>

These practices are increasingly being abolished, with promising developments in recent years across a swathe of countries moving towards supported decision-making schemes and programmes (Table 6) -- supported decision-making is an integral component of safeguarding the legal capacity of persons with disabilities. For instance, pioneering legislation in Austria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru and Spain, abolishes all forms of guardianship laws and substituted decision-making regimes. Parallel to this, a number of countries – for example, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Kenya, Latvia, Sweden, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania and the United States – have implemented pilot projects for instituting some form of supported decision-making or have introduced supported decision-making while retaining also substituted decision-making. These developments have also influenced mental health legislation, policy and practice to reflect the new

paradigm set by the standards of the CRPD.<sup>527</sup> In Peru for example, mental health legislation has been adopted to recognise and allow for some form of supported decision-making procedures in relation to mental health, a significant development given that mental health legislation and practice particularly affect persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.<sup>528</sup>

But even in countries in which supported decision-making is implemented, these regimes do not always adequately respond to the diversity, multiplicity and complexity of the needs of persons with disabilities in their access to justice.<sup>529</sup> Persons with disabilities may face barriers to access supported decision-making due to age and gender, particularly in the context of countries where supported decision-making schemes are largely implemented by informal family and community networks and where socio-cultural beliefs prescribe respect for elders and males. For instance, in supported decision-making schemes piloted in India, Kenya and Lebanon, it was found that young women in particular had limited access to such schemes and were more likely to have their legal capacity denied, particularly with respect to financial and property decisions.<sup>530</sup> Furthermore, restrictions to legal capacity may still persist under supported decision-making, especially if the same institutions of previous guardianship laws remain in place.<sup>531</sup>

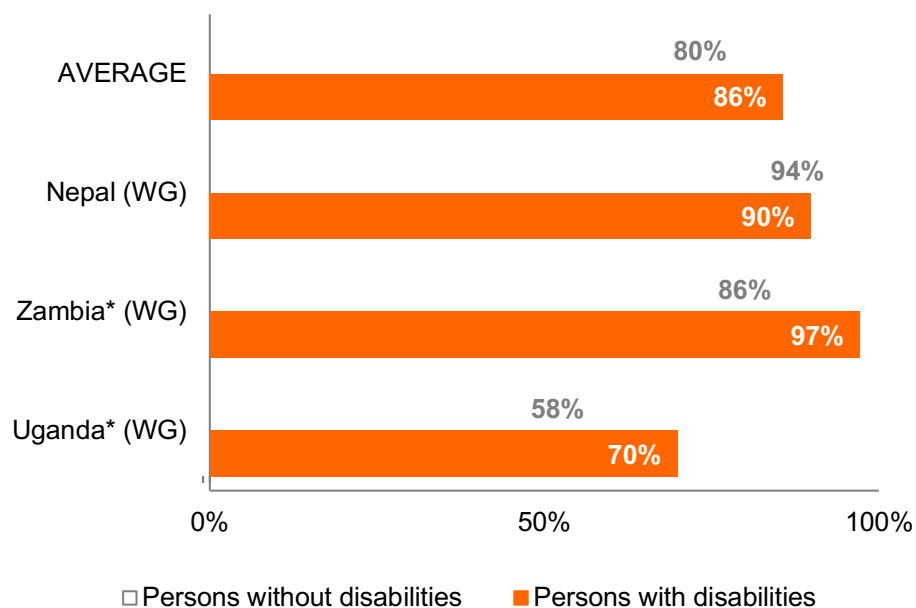
For many persons with disabilities, access to legal services remains a challenge. In three countries, on average, among persons with disabilities who needed legal advice, 86 per cent were not able to receive it (Figure 208). This unmet need for legal advice among persons with disabilities is very high in all three countries, ranging from 70 per cent in Uganda to 97 per cent in Zambia. Many persons with disabilities lack access to education (see chapter on Goal 4) and, without education, they may lack the skills to seek legal advice. Persons with disabilities also tend to have fewer financial resources (see chapter on Goal 1) to meet the costs of legal services. Those who are able to overcome these obstacles and seek legal advice may face further barriers. Lack of disability awareness among legal officers, lack of accessibility features and lack of reasonable accommodation in legal services are ongoing obstacles for persons with disabilities to enjoy equal access to justice.

#### **Box 9. Supported decision-making versus guardianships and substitute decision making**

*Guardianships and substituted decision-making* are used to allow another person to have the legal authority to make decisions on the behalf of the person with disabilities. With *supported decision-making*, persons with disabilities enjoy full recognition and equality under the law, exercise their legal capacity to make decisions and receive support from a trusted individual, network of individuals or entity in making these decisions. According to the General Comment No. 1 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, governments are required to move away from *guardianships and substituted decision-making* in favour of *supported decision-making*.



**Figure 208. Percentage of persons who needed but were not able to receive legal advice, by disability status, in 3 countries, in 2018 or latest year available.**



Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).

Indicator 16.3.1 monitors the proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms. In the European Union, persons with disabilities report violence to the police more often than persons without disabilities: in 2019, 51 per cent of persons with severe disabilities reported the most recent incident of violence to the police, compared to 40 per cent of persons with not severe disabilities and 29 per cent of persons without disabilities.<sup>532</sup>

Indicator 16.3.3 monitors the proportion of the population who have experienced a dispute in the past two years and who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism. Persons with disabilities also face barriers accessing formal and informal dispute resolution mechanisms. In Gambia, for example, 47 per cent of persons without disabilities but only 1 per cent of persons with disabilities experiencing a dispute have access to such mechanisms (Figure 209).

Accessibility to persons with disabilities is not in place throughout the justice system, including in police premises, courtrooms, legal documents and court decisions. In four developing countries, on average, 34 per cent of persons with disabilities indicate that the police stations are not accessible; and 36 per cent indicate that the courts are not accessible (Figure 210). About 25 per cent of persons with disabilities in Malawi and about 40 per cent of persons with disabilities in Nepal experience that lack of accessibility. Crowdsourced data on courts and police stations worldwide, mostly in developing countries, found that as of 2022, 59 per cent were accessible for wheelchair users, 19 per cent were partially accessible and 22



per cent were not accessible (Figure 211). There has been a slight progress from 2018 to 2022 from 54 to 59 per cent.

**Figure 209. Percentage of persons who have experienced a dispute in the past two years who accessed a formal or informal dispute resolution mechanism, by disability status, in Gambia, in 2021 (indicator 16.3.3).**



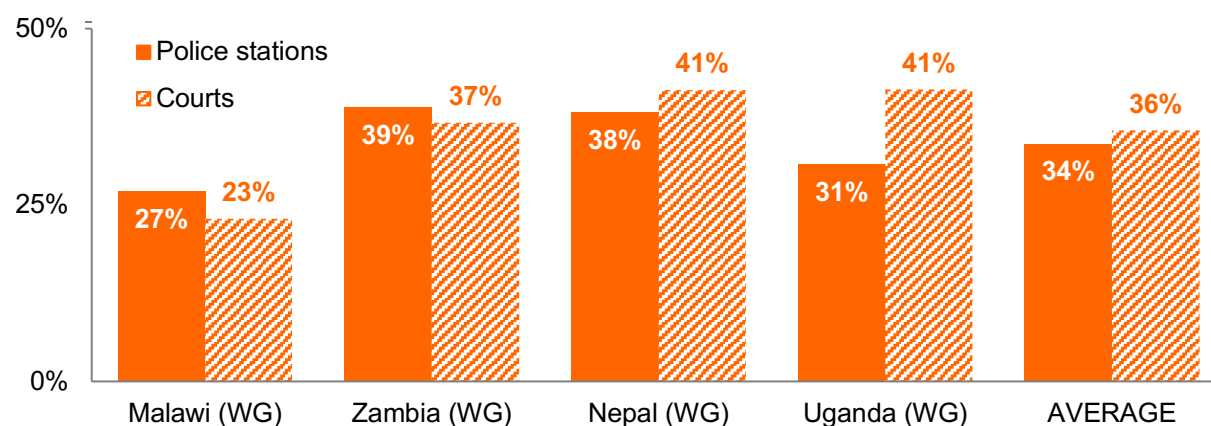
Source: United Nations SDG Indicators Database (2023).<sup>284</sup>

Lack of legal documents in formats accessible for persons with disabilities also remains a major barrier. For example, among 10-13 countries/territories in Asia and the Pacific, court judgements are typically not available in accessible formats: only 10 per cent of countries make all court judgements available in Braille and epub, only 20 per cent in easy-to read, only 30 per cent in accessible text in webpages and only 50 per cent in accessible doc/pdf (Figure 212). National laws tend to be more available in accessible formats but they are still largely not accessible, with only 20-30 per cent of countries making all national laws available in easy-read, epub and Braille. Accessible online text and accessible doc/pdf are more common, with 60 per cent of countries making all national laws available in these formats. Comparatively, constitutions are the legal documents most available in accessible formats, with about 80 per cent of these countries making their constitutions available in accessible text online and in accessible doc/pdf, but they are still seldom available in other accessible formats: less than 50 per cent of countries make these available in easy-read, epub and Braille.

Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities are generally lacking throughout the justice system and vary by regions of the world.

In the European Union, 89 per cent of countries provide procedural accommodations to persons with disabilities and 67 per cent provide adjusted alternative resolution procedures for persons with disabilities (Figure 213). In only 74 per cent of countries, persons with disabilities can be listened to in person and express their will. Accessible features vary: information in accessible formats is provided in 74 per cent of countries; Braille, sign language, easy-to-read and other accessible formats are available upon request in 59 per cent of countries; and accessible digital solutions at first instance courts are available in 56 per cent of countries. Only 9 countries in the European Union provide all these accommodations to make courts more accessible for persons with disabilities.

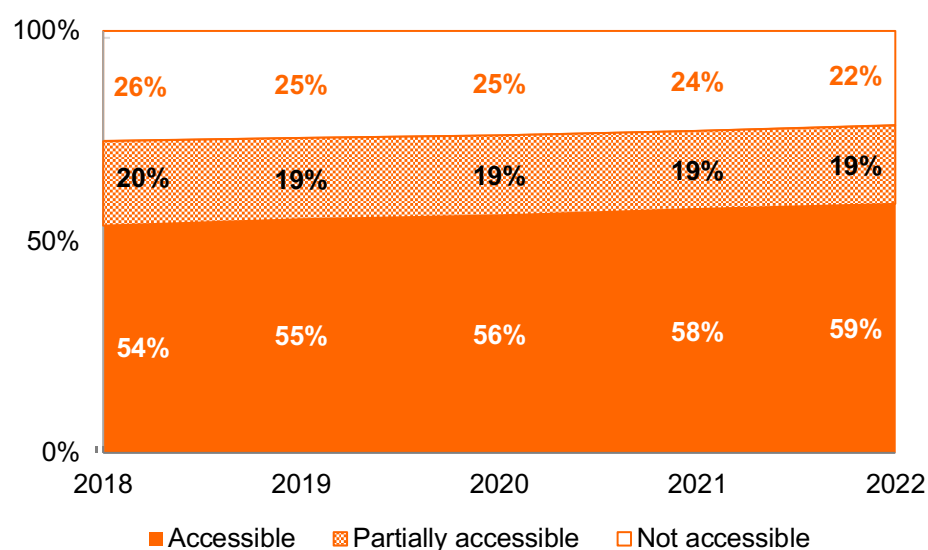
**Figure 210. Percentage of persons with disabilities who reported that magistrate's office/traditional courts and police stations are not accessible, in 5 countries, in 2015-2018.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

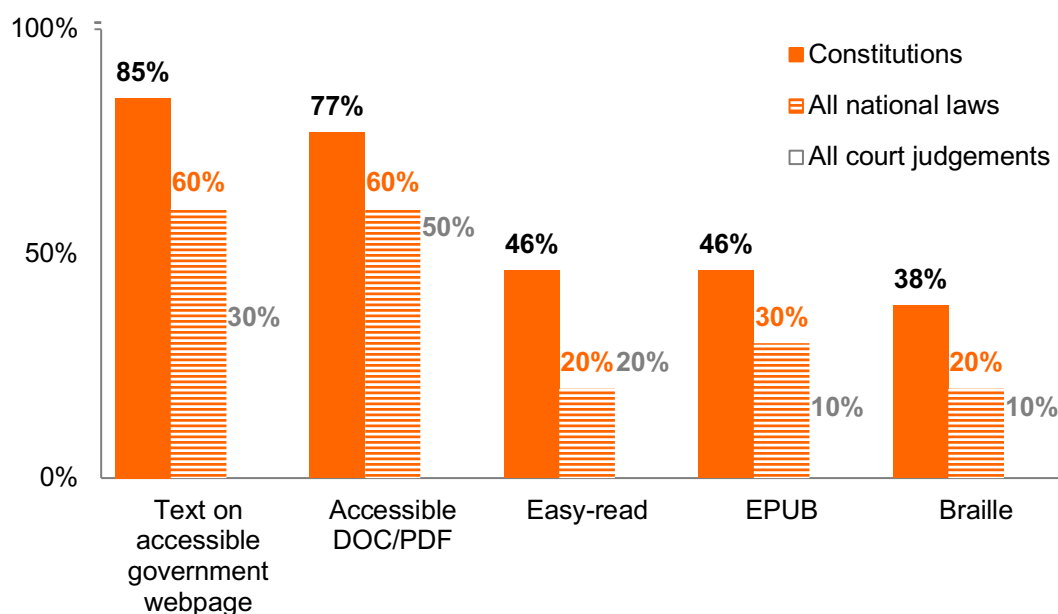
*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

**Figure 211. Accessibility of courts and police stations for wheelchair users, worldwide, from 2018-2022.**



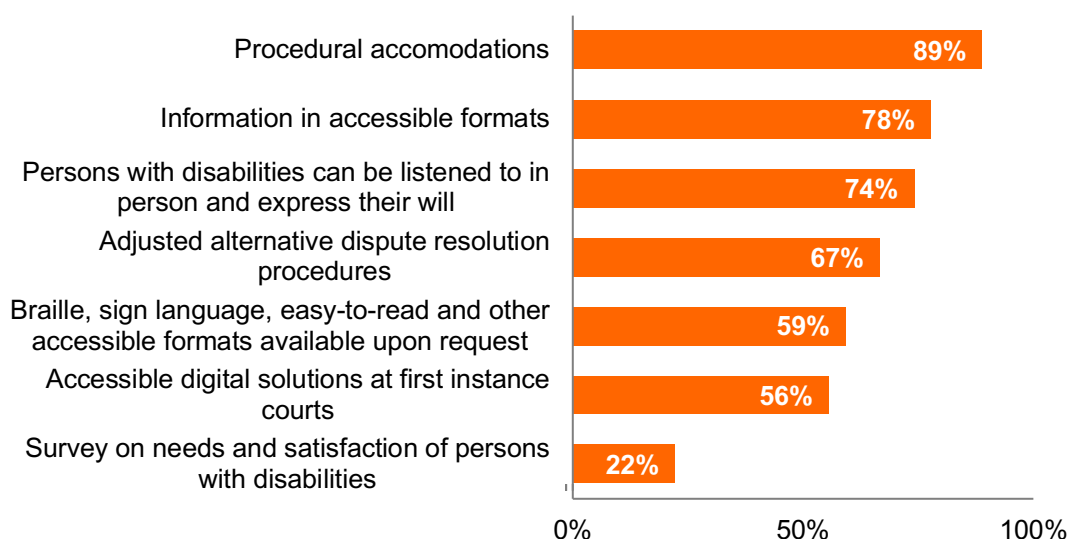
*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from Sozialhelden<sup>10</sup>).*

**Figure 212. Percentage of countries/territories with constitutions, all national laws and all court judgements in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, in 10-13 countries/territories in Asia and the Pacific, in 2022 or latest year available.**



Source: ESCAP.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 213. Percentage of countries with specific arrangements for access to justice of persons with disabilities, in 27 countries in the European Union, in 2021.**



Source: European Commission (2022).<sup>533</sup>

In the United States, although court accommodations are provided under disability legislation and guidelines have been developed for the judiciary in this regard, access to court accommodations by persons with disabilities varies from state to state, particularly in criminal trials.<sup>534</sup> Some states charge defendants fees for accommodations such as Braille, large print documents and the use of a sign language interpreter, and half of states do not provide information on how to request accommodations during the trial.<sup>534</sup>

In African countries, the implementation of court accommodations varies from case to case and often depends on the individual discretion of the judge.<sup>535</sup> Moreover, the range of accommodations which are available cover only a fraction of the need, considering the diversity of persons with disabilities; court accommodations are broadly not suitable for persons with severe communication disabilities or those with multiple disabilities; persons with disabilities still encounter discriminatory practices or harmful attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes in the courtroom; and legislation, legal information and documents are still not always disseminated in an accessible manner.<sup>536</sup>

To overcome these challenges, an increasing number of countries has taken measures to provide accommodations in court (Table 6), including strategies, communication boards, intermediaries, court preparation officers, communication accommodations, as well as physical accommodations, such as wheelchair access and separate testifying rooms.<sup>537</sup>

**Table 6. Examples good practices to ensure access to justice for persons with disabilities.**

Type of good practice	Examples of countries where this practice has been implemented
Abolishing guardianship and establishing supported decision making (laws, partial implementation or pilot projects)	Argentina, <sup>538</sup> Australia, <sup>538</sup> Austria, <sup>539</sup> Brazil, <sup>540</sup> Bulgaria, <sup>538</sup> Canada, <sup>538</sup> Colombia, <sup>538,541</sup> Costa Rica, <sup>542</sup> Czechia, <sup>538</sup> Hungary, <sup>538</sup> India, <sup>538,543</sup> Ireland, <sup>538</sup> Israel, <sup>538</sup> Kenya, <sup>538</sup> Latvia, <sup>538</sup> Peru, <sup>538,544,545</sup> Spain, <sup>546</sup> Sweden, <sup>538</sup> United Kingdom, <sup>538</sup> Tanzania, <sup>538</sup> United States <sup>538</sup>
Providing reasonable accommodation in courts	Argentina, <sup>547</sup> Australia, <sup>547</sup> Azerbaijan, <sup>547</sup> Canada, <sup>547</sup> China, <sup>547</sup> Costa Rica, <sup>547</sup> Dominican Republic, <sup>547</sup> Ecuador, <sup>547</sup> European Union, <sup>548</sup> India, <sup>547</sup> Indonesia, <sup>547</sup> Israel, <sup>547</sup> Malawi, <sup>547</sup> Mexico, <sup>547</sup> New Zealand, <sup>547</sup> Peru, <sup>547</sup> South Africa, <sup>547</sup> Turkmenistan, <sup>547</sup> United States, <sup>547</sup> United Kingdom, <sup>547</sup> Zimbabwe <sup>547</sup>
Awareness raising and training on disability inclusion for justice systems officials, including police, the judiciary, attorneys, representatives of the legal system and investigators	Argentina, <sup>549</sup> Costa Rica, <sup>550</sup> Israel, <sup>551,552</sup> Mexico, <sup>553</sup> United Kingdom <sup>554</sup>
Free legal assistance for persons with disabilities	Honduras <sup>555</sup>
Partnerships between persons with disabilities and the justice system	United States <sup>556</sup>

Over 180 countries have ratified the CRPD, which typically entail the adoption of laws at the national level to ensure access to justice for persons with disabilities. At the regional level, there have been notable developments in standards setting, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, adopted in 2018, which expressly includes provisions on legal capacity and access to justice;<sup>557</sup> and the resolution by the Council of Europe on the treatment of detainees with disabilities, also adopted in 2018, which sets out the rights and standards for the treatment of persons with disabilities under detention.<sup>558</sup>

But many existing laws and policies on disability lack an intersectional lens and do not adequately account for diversity of persons with disabilities and do not address barriers to access to justice. For example, indigenous persons with disabilities require services which are culturally capable in order to ensure equal access to justice.<sup>559</sup> Women and girls with disabilities are at high risk of gender-based violence, particularly those with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, yet many countries' criminal justice systems do not provide reporting mechanisms which are appropriate for women and girls with disabilities, nor specialised services that are gender sensitive.<sup>560</sup>

A recent positive development is the implementation of surveys by the justice system to seek feedback from users with disabilities on their experience in the justice system, including the courts and legal aid programmes. For instance, in the European Union, 22 per cent of countries conduct these surveys (Figure 213). Awareness raising, training and guidelines on disability inclusion for officials in the justice system have also been promoted in many countries, including national protocols addressed to the police and the judiciary on the treatment of persons with disabilities (Table 6).

## Summary of findings and the way forward

Target 16.3 calls for equal access to justice for all. Achieving this target for persons with disabilities, in line with articles 12 and 13 of the CRPD, requires protecting their right to legal capacity and providing the support they may require in exercising this right. Although progress has been made in the realisation of target 16.3 for persons with disabilities, obstacles to accessing justice remain. The persistence of these obstacles is especially concerning given that persons with disabilities -- and especially children and women with disabilities and persons with psychosocial disabilities -- are 2 to 6 times more likely than others to be victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking (see chapter on targets 16.1 and 16.2).

Guardianship laws are still in place in many countries, depriving persons with disabilities of their legal capacity -- persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, persons who are deaf or blind, persons with hearing impairments, persons with autism, persons with dementia, women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities are particularly affected by these discriminatory laws. Moreover, the justice system overall lacks accessibility features and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, including in court rooms, police stations and legal services. In developing countries, about a

third of persons with disabilities indicate that courts and police stations are not accessible to them. National laws and court documents, including court decisions, are also typically not available in formats accessible for persons with disabilities. In some developing countries, more than two thirds of persons with disabilities do not have access to legal services when they need them. Many officials throughout the justice system have no training on disability inclusion. Data remains scarce on the barriers persons with disabilities face in accessing justice and their experience in the justice system and research is lacking on the development and implementation of supported decision-making systems, especially in developing countries.

Progress has been made in the last 5 years, with more countries having moved away from guardianship laws to supported decision-making systems. There has been slow progress in improving accessibility of courts and police stations to wheelchair users, from 54 per cent of courts and police stations accessible to them in 2018 to 59 per cent in 2022. At this rate of progress, by 2030, it is expected that 1 in every 3 courts and police stations will remain not accessible. To achieve universal accessibility for wheelchairs users by 2030, courts and police stations need to become accessible at a rate 4 times faster than current rates of progress.

To address the barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing justice, the following measures are recommended:

- 1. Abolish laws and policies that impose substituted decision-making in legal proceedings, against the will of persons with disabilities.** Ensure the meaningful and effective participation of representative organisations of persons with disabilities in all processes and stages of law reform and policy formulation. Promote supported decision-making.
- 2. Empower persons with disabilities to exercise their legal rights and access justice.** Offer training to persons with disabilities on legal information and their legal rights to enhance their ability to exercise their rights -- all training should be provided in accessible formats. Provide free legal assistance to persons with disabilities who cannot afford legal services.
- 2. Make the justice system fully accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities.** Make the constitution, national laws, legal information and court decisions available in accessible formats, including in easy-to-understand communication. Make police stations, court rooms and premises providing legal services accessible to persons with disabilities. Provide reasonable accommodations upon request in courts and throughout the justice system. Mainstream an intersectional approach across the criminal and civil justice system to ensure that services reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities and are gender-sensitive, age appropriate and culturally capable for persons with disabilities. Involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in designing policies and practices to make the justice system fully accessible and inclusive.

**3. Train judges and justice officials on disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities.** Focus training on eliminating harmful attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes and promoting practices inclusive of persons with disabilities of all genders, age and ethnicity. Involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in designing and implementing these trainings. Ensure that all training is delivered in formats accessible for persons with disabilities.

**4. Improve the availability of data and research on the experience of persons with disabilities in the justice system and the barriers they experience in accessing justice.** Institute data collection systems in the police and in courts for the regular collection of administrative data disaggregated by disability, as well as sex and age, including on cases and outcomes of trials involving persons with disabilities (whether as victims of crime, defendants or claimants). Conduct regular satisfaction surveys among persons with disabilities using the police and the courts, including on the use and effectiveness of court accommodations. Conduct population surveys to collect data on the experience of persons with disabilities in accessing justice and the barriers they face; these surveys should be designed to allow disaggregation by sex, age, ethnicity and urban/rural location. Ensure monitoring and evaluation of supported decision-making systems for persons with disabilities. Involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in research as well as in data collection, dissemination and analysis.

## **Developing inclusive institutions, ensuring inclusive decision-making and reducing bribery and corruption (targets 16.5, 16.6 and 16.7)**

Target 16.6 calls for effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and target 16.7 aims at ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Target 16.5 calls for substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms.

Inclusive decision-making is one of the calls of the CRPD, whose Preamble acknowledges that persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them. In addition, article 4 specifically requires States Parties to closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in decision-making processes relating to persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, article 29 stipulates that States should ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, and should protect their right to vote, to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.

In 2021, the United Nations General Assembly resolution 75/154 reiterated that persons with disabilities should be actively involved in all aspects of public and political life, including in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including national and international development programmes. The resolution also called upon United Nations Member States and other stakeholders to include persons with disabilities in all stages of policymaking and decision-making related to COVID-19 response and recovery. In 2022, the UN ECOSOC resolution 2022/9 encouraged Governments to address inequalities that exist within the public sector workforce and to take steps to address social inequities in the design and delivery of public services (paragraph 12).

This section discusses the implementation of targets 16.6 and 16.7 for persons with disabilities and the remaining barriers to disability-inclusive institutions and decision-making. It presents good practices and recommendations for realizing these 2 targets for persons with disabilities. The section also presents an illustrative analysis of the situation of persons with disabilities vis-a-vis target 16.5.

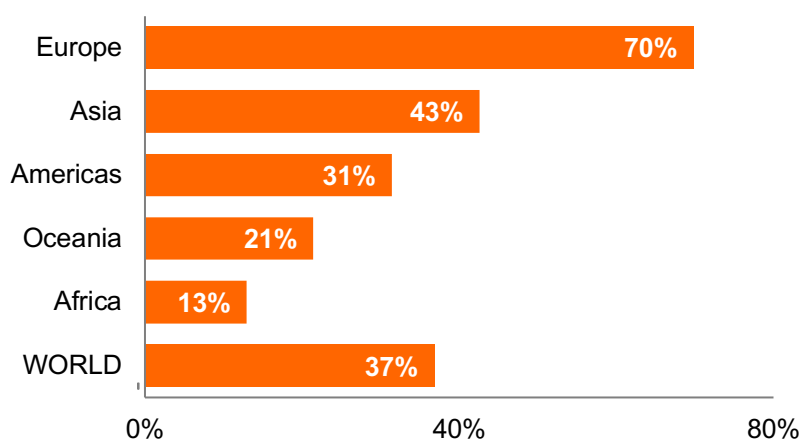
### **Current situation and progress so far**

#### **Inclusive institutions (target 16.6)**

Target 16.6 calls for effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels. Public institutions and public services remain largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities due to lack of accessibility, discrimination, stigma and negative attitudes, including barriers in accessing public buildings as well as digital and in-person services.

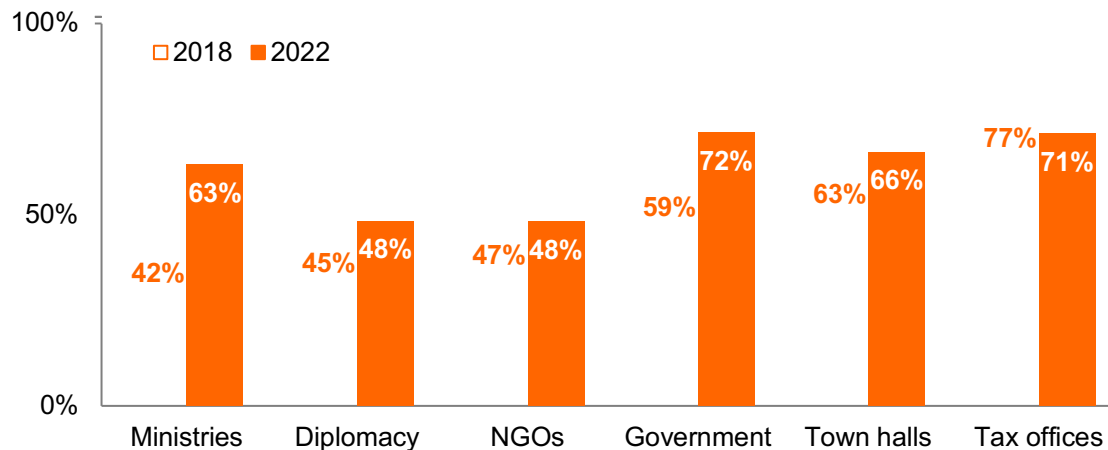


**Figure 214. Percentage of countries with a national portal that is accessible for persons with disabilities according to W3C guidelines, in the world and by region, among 193 countries, in 2020.**



Source: 2020 United Nations E-Government Survey (UNDESA).

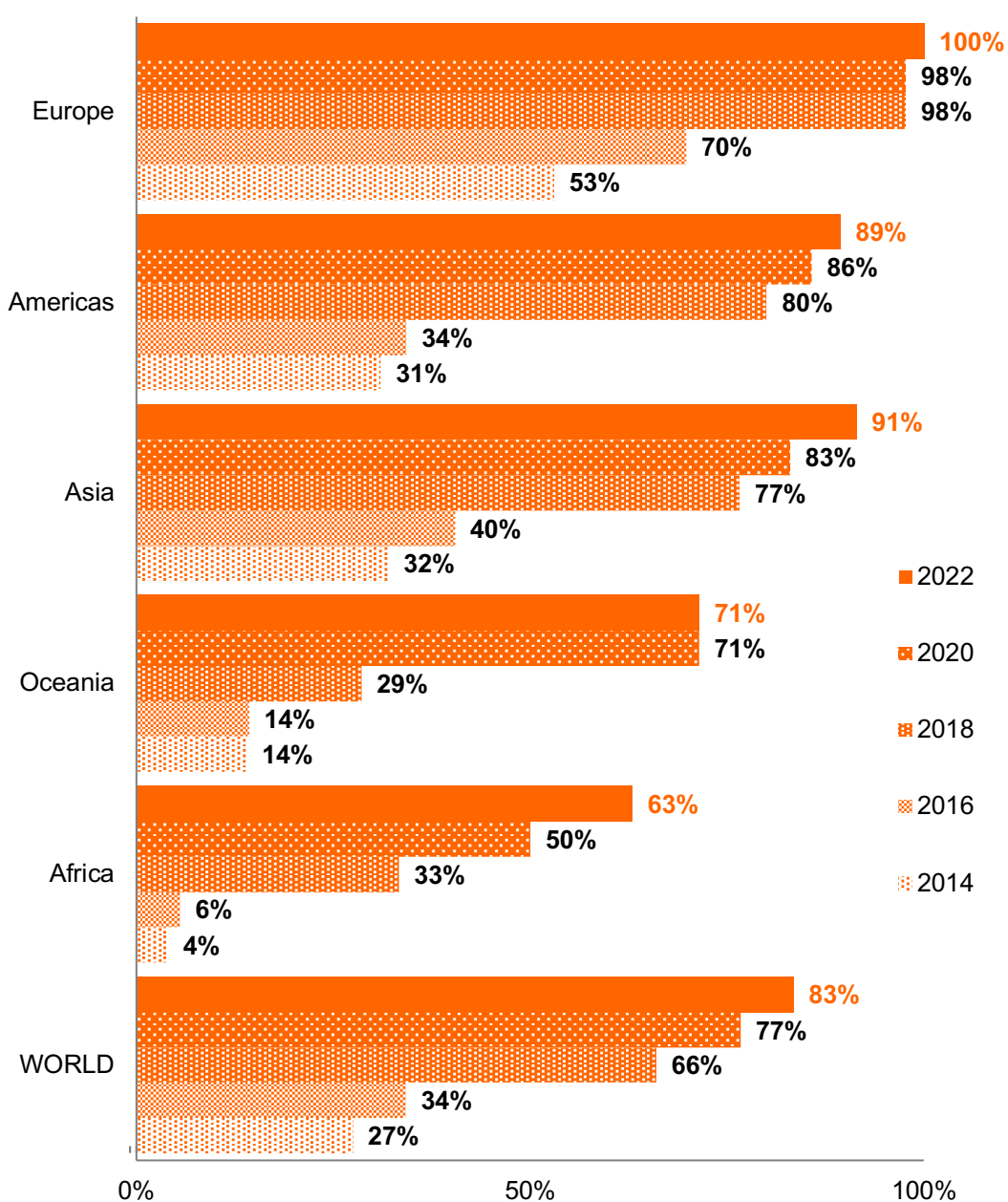
**Figure 215. Percentage of ministries, diplomacy-related premises, non-governmental organizations, government premises, town halls and tax offices that are accessible for wheelchair users, worldwide, in 2018 and 2022.**



Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from Sozialhelden<sup>10</sup>).

National online governmental portals are often not accessible to persons with disabilities (Figure 214). In 2020, only 37 per cent of countries offered a national website portal that was accessible for persons with disabilities according to W3C guidelines, though the percentages vary according to region. Europe had the highest percentage of countries with accessible national portals (70 per cent), while Africa had the lowest (13 per cent). In between, 43 per cent of countries in Asia had accessible national portals, as did 31 per cent of countries in the Americas and 21 per cent of countries in Oceania.

**Figure 216. Percentage of countries with online government services for persons with disabilities, in the world and by region, among 193 countries, in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022.**



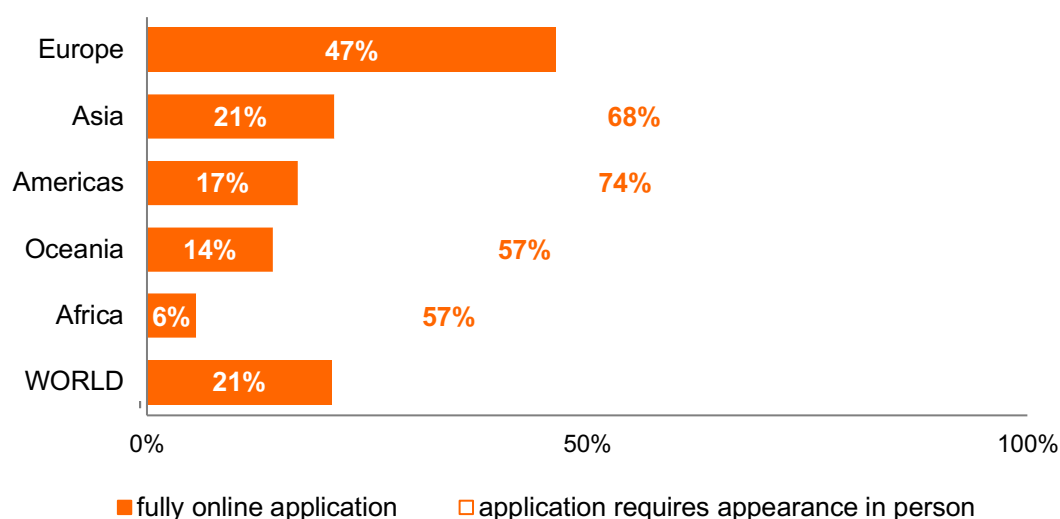
Source: 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022 United Nations E-Government Surveys (UNDESA).

Apart from national portals, other public institutions and services lack inclusion and remain inaccessible for persons with disabilities. In 2022, among 43 countries, 56 per cent of libraries did not have an official policy on access for persons with disabilities. In addition, 22 per cent were not accessible for persons with physical disabilities; 51 per cent were not accessible to persons with sensory impairments; and 55 per cent were not accessible to persons with cognitive disabilities. Furthermore, 27 per cent of libraries indicated that their website was not accessible for persons with disabilities. Human and financial resources to make libraries accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities remained scarce. Only 29 per cent of libraries had a person responsible for accessibility in the library; only 11 per cent of libraries had all their staff trained in accessibility; and merely 16 per cent had a budget for accessibility.<sup>561</sup>

Crowdsourced data, mostly from developed countries, indicates that in 2022, 72 per cent of government premises, 71 per cent of tax offices, 66 per cent of town halls, 63 per cent of governmental ministries and 48 per cent of diplomacy-related premises and non-governmental organizations were accessible for wheelchair users, with little or no improvement in accessibility since 2018 for all these premises except for governmental ministries and government premises (Figure 215).

Countries have increasingly been investing in the provision of online governmental services for persons with disabilities (Figure 216). In 2022, 83 per cent of countries had these services, up from 27 per cent in 2014 – a threefold increase. In 2022, online services for persons with disabilities were highest in Europe (100 per cent) and lowest in Africa (63 per cent), though every region made significant improvements since 2014.

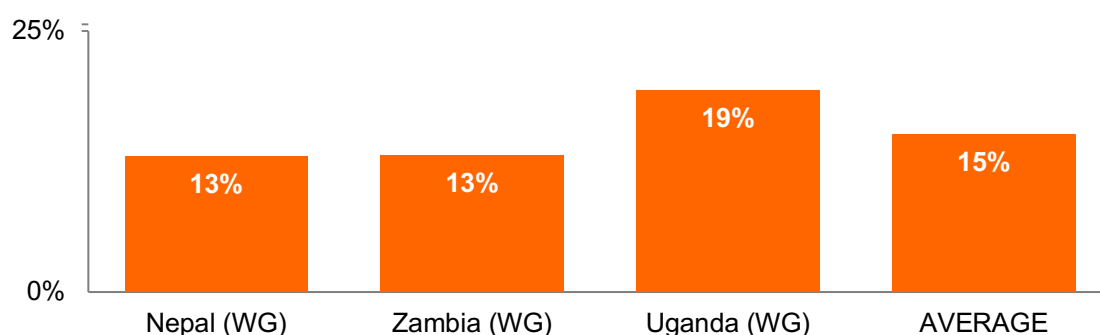
**Figure 217. Percentage of countries in which persons with disabilities can apply fully online for services versus those which require appearance in person to benefit from the service, among 193 countries, in 2022.**



Source: 2022 United Nations E-Government Survey (UNDESA).

A requirement to appear in person to access public services can be a barrier for persons with disabilities, particularly persons with mobility-related disabilities. Online access to public services therefore enhances much-needed access to persons with disabilities. However, 62 per cent of countries, despite offering information about the services online, still require that the individual with disabilities appear in person to benefit from the service (Figure 217). Only 21 per cent of countries in the world offer both online information about services for persons with disabilities and online access to these services without requiring an appearance in person — such as applying for a disability benefit. Europe has the highest percentage of countries that do so (47 per cent) and Africa has the lowest percentage (6 per cent).

**Figure 218. Persons with disabilities who report being discriminated against in public services, in 3 countries, in 2018 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

Discriminatory attitudes within many public institutions remain a major barrier for persons with disabilities. In three developing countries, on average, 13 to 19 per cent of persons with disabilities reported being discriminated against in public services (Figure 218).

The extent to which disability inclusion projects and programs are prioritized in public budgeting and government expenditures is reflective of government and political leaderships' commitment to promote an inclusive society and a governance system in which persons with disabilities can fully participate. These government expenditures may include spending to make public buildings and spaces accessible, education inclusive or to provide disability benefits.

Among 56 countries, public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities corresponds on average to 1.5 per cent of their GDP, with remarkable variations across countries (Figure 219). Denmark spends the most on disability benefits -- about 5 per cent of its total GDP. India and Indonesia spend the least -- about 0.001 per cent of their total GDP.

Among 37 countries, on average, public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities as a percentage of GDP has slightly decreased since 2014 from 2.08 to 2.04 per cent of the GDP (Figure

220). This decrease was seen in 19 countries, though in 18 countries this percentage has increased. Germany, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway increased disability benefit spending (as a percentage of total GDP) anywhere between 0.22 and 0.56 percentage points.

The international development community has been funding projects furthering the inclusion of persons with disabilities in government and civil society decision-making. In 2020, bilateral aid to support projects to further inclusion of persons with disabilities in government and civil society totalled 993 million US dollars.<sup>562</sup> The largest commitments of bilateral aid went to countries in East Africa, including Ethiopia and Uganda, as well as in South Asia, such as Iraq and Pakistan.

**Box 10. Reducing the exposure of persons with disabilities to corruption and bribery in all their forms (target 16.5)**

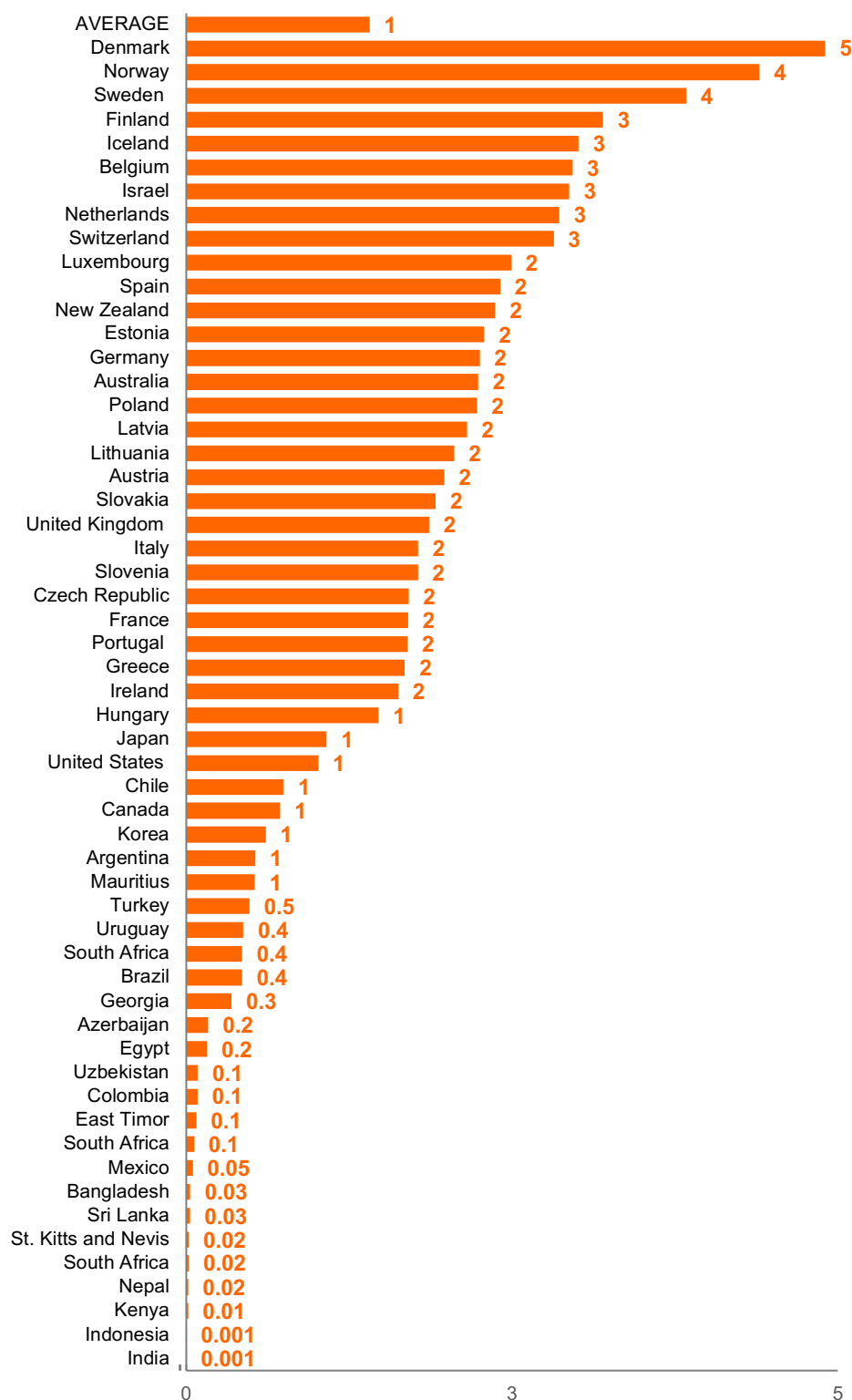
Target 16.5 calls for substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms, and indicator 16.5.1 monitors the proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official or were asked for a bribe by public officials, during the previous 12 months.

Persons with disabilities may be exposed to corruption and bribery in a different way than the rest of the population. On one hand, because of the barriers persons with disabilities face, public officials may try to take advantage of them and request bribes from them more often than from persons without disabilities. On the other hand, public officials may target persons with disabilities less often than others because persons with disabilities often have less access to financial resources than others. A survey in Ghana in 2021 found that persons with disabilities (23 per cent) were slightly less likely than persons without disabilities (27 per cent) to pay or be asked to pay a bribe when interacting with public officials.<sup>563</sup>

During disasters, conflicts and other emergencies, persons with disabilities may also be at higher risk of being exposed to bribery. For example, in the protection of civilians site in Malakal (South Sudan), 0.3 per cent of internally displaced persons with disabilities encountered bribery when attempting to access services (Figure 13 of the chapter on targets 16.1 and 16.2).

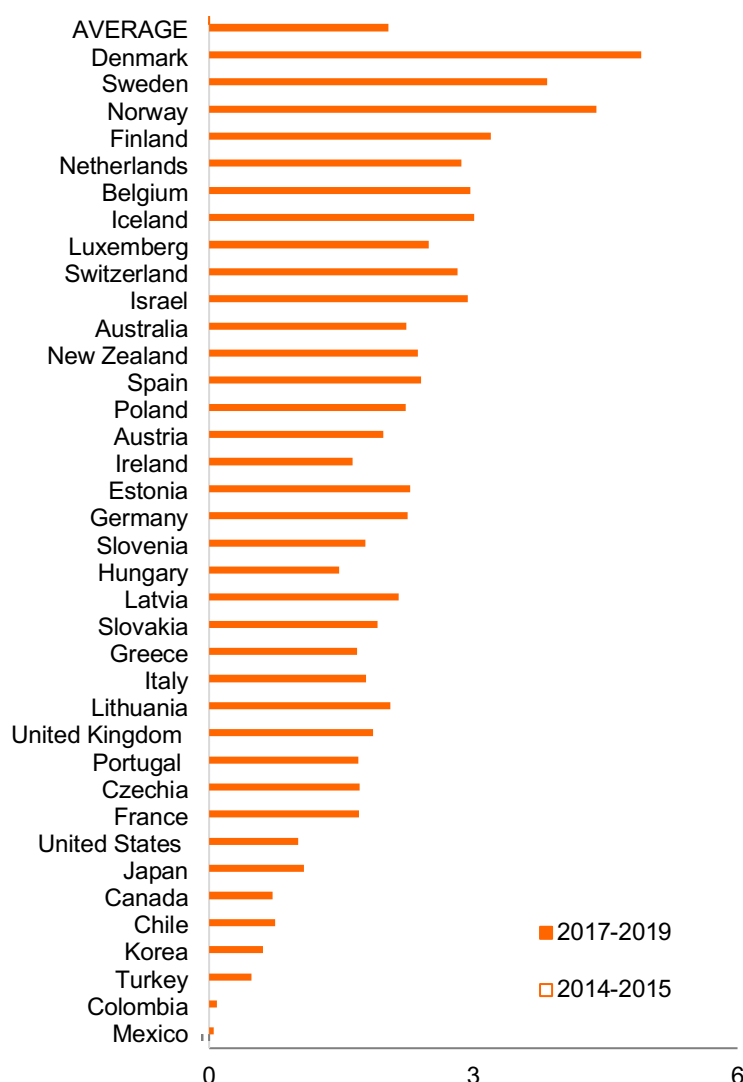
*Note: All data collected with the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

**Figure 219. Public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities as a percentage of GDP, in 56 countries, in 2020 or latest year available.**



Source: OECD<sup>564</sup> and Development Pathways<sup>565</sup>.

**Figure 220. Trend in public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities as a percentage of GDP over time, in 37 countries, from 2014-2015 to 2017-2019.**



Source: OECD.<sup>564</sup>

### Inclusive decision-making (target 16.7)

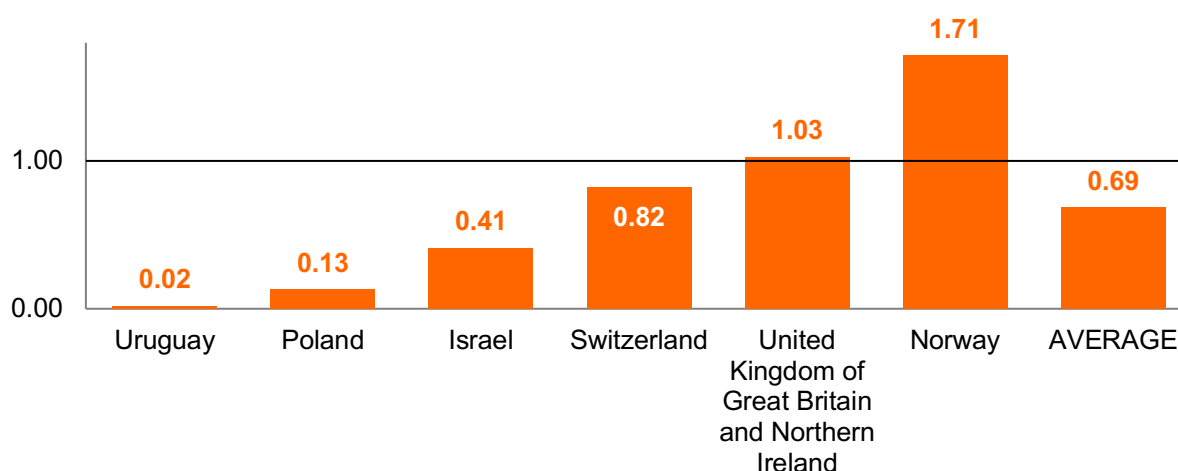
SDG target 16.7 calls for ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels and specifically includes two indicators to be disaggregated by disability.

Indicator 16.7.1 monitors the proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, for inter-alia persons with disabilities. Data on this indicator shows that the percentage of persons with disabilities in the national-level public service personnel remains low in various countries (Figure 221). Persons with

disabilities are significantly underrepresented, relative to their share of national populations, in Israel, Poland and Uruguay, and slightly underrepresented in Switzerland. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, their representation is about the same as in the national population and in Norway, their representation is above their proportion in the national population.

Lack of data does not allow assessing the extent to which decision-making in governments and the political system are inclusive and responsive. Available data from Tunisia allows a glimpse into a potential larger trend. In Tunisia, a lower percentage of persons with disabilities (29 per cent) than persons without disabilities (37 per cent) believe that decision-making is inclusive; but a higher percentage of persons with disabilities (11 per cent) than persons without disabilities (7 per cent) believe that decision making is responsive.<sup>284</sup>

**Figure 221. Ratio of the percentage of persons with disabilities in the national-level public service personnel (including police, education, health, front-desk administrative and all other public service personnel) to the percentage of persons with disabilities in the national population (indicator 16.7.1), in 6 countries, in 2020.**



Source: UN SDG Indicators Database.<sup>284</sup>

Persons with disabilities tend to be underrepresented in decision-making bodies, such as national legislative bodies. For instance, in 2018-2022, 4 out of 10 countries/territories in the Asia and Pacific region four had no parliamentarians with disabilities in their national parliaments, and in the others, the percentage of parliamentarians with disabilities ranged between 0.4 and 6 per cent of all parliamentarians.<sup>14</sup> Some countries, however, are showing some signs of progress toward the inclusion and representation of persons with disabilities in decision-making bodies. Uganda, for example, reported about 47,000 representatives with disabilities serving in elected bodies — a result which was facilitated by the adoption and implementation of accessibility requirements in public sector buildings and federal and



local disability inclusion quotas (including gender-balanced quotas).<sup>566</sup>

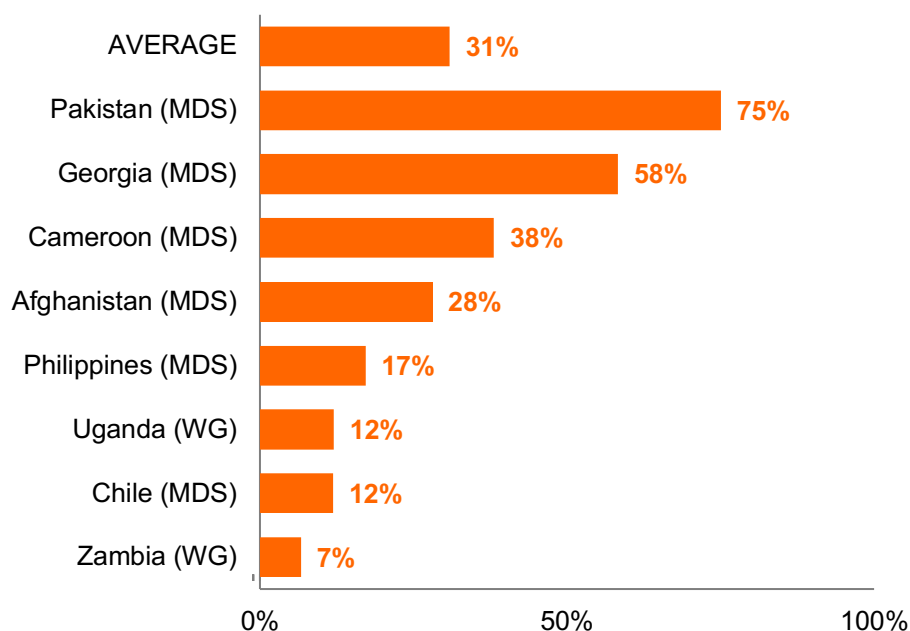
#### **Box 11. Government engaging with persons with disabilities in Malta**

The government of Malta has adopted a wide approach to engaging in consultations and dialogues with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. In 2014, the first National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disability was designed by the Committee for a Right Society. The committee is composed of persons with disabilities and their relatives, representatives of persons with disabilities and other experts. The government of Malta also promotes daily meetings with persons with disabilities, other civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and the Parliamentary Secretariat holds weekly meetings with the National Commission for the Rights of Persons with a Disability and other stakeholders, in which relevant governmental projects and policies are discussed. The Parliament of Malta passed the Sign Language Act (2015), which makes sign language an official language for the Republic of Malta. Similarly, the Parliament of Malta has passed legislation that makes the inclusion of at least one person with disabilities within governmental boards mandatory.<sup>567</sup>

Persons with disabilities often remain alienated in decision-making on emergency and disaster risk reduction and response planning. Worldwide, in 2023, as few as 14 per cent of persons with disabilities had participated in disaster risk reduction decision-making in their communities, the same percentage as in 2013 (see chapter on Goals 1, 11 and 13).

In addition to holding public office, voting is one of the most direct forms of political participation and a way for citizens to exercise their political rights. In many countries, persons with disabilities still face legal barriers to voting and to being elected for office: 67 per cent of countries have exceptions in their constitutions, legislation or laws, that restrict the right to vote of persons with disabilities, of which 73 per cent have exclusions targeting persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.<sup>32</sup> On the right of persons with disabilities to be elected for office, 91 per cent have exceptions, out of which 65 per cent include exclusions targeting persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.<sup>32</sup> Electoral violence – including acts or threats to intimidate, physically harm, abuse or blackmail a political stakeholder to influence a political process -- is another obstacle for persons with disabilities to exercise their political rights as many of them opt to not vote or stand for political office for fear of violence.<sup>568</sup> Recent research suggests that persons with disabilities are as likely as persons without disabilities to be targets of electoral violence, but experience more negative impacts in terms of mental health and social wellbeing.<sup>569</sup> There is a lack of research and data on electoral violence on women with disabilities and indigenous persons with disabilities, but given the vulnerabilities of these groups and the higher levels of violence among women with disabilities than others (see chapter on targets 16.1 and 16.2), it is likely that they are more impacted by electoral violence.

**Figure 222. Percentage of persons with disabilities who found voting problematic or not accessible, the last election, in 8 countries, in 2021 or latest year available.**



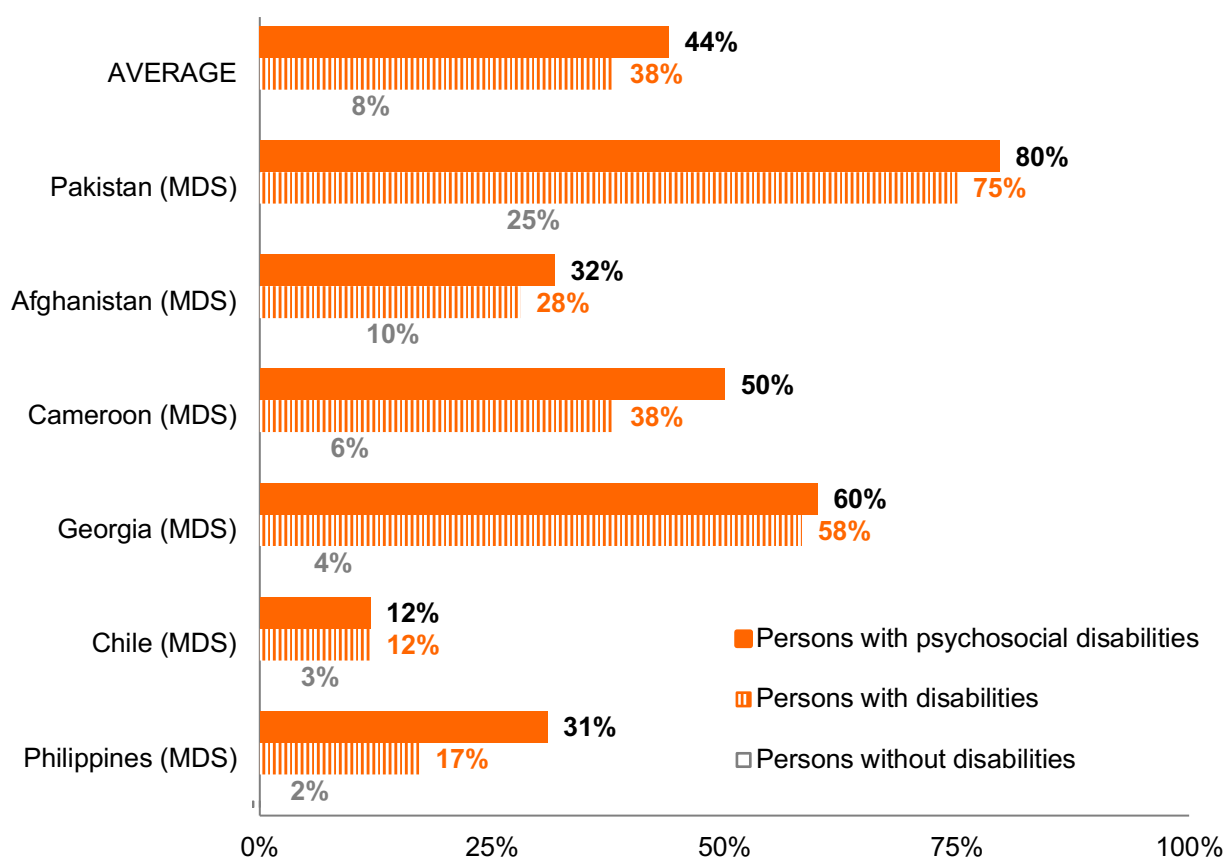
*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey; (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>) and WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).*

Lack of accessibility of many voting sites is another barrier to persons with disabilities. Ballots are often not provided in accessible formats, entrances to polling premises are often not be accessible to wheelchair users, voting often has long lines without priority access for persons with disabilities facing difficulties waiting in line, signs to the poling premises are often not provided in accessible formats, and there are often no election officials communicating in sign language. For example, among 8 countries, on average, 31 per cent of persons with disabilities found voting problematic or not accessible (Figure 222). In 6 countries, persons with psychosocial disabilities were more likely to report that voting in the last election was problematic or very problematic compared to all persons with disabilities, and persons with disabilities found it very problematic to vote in the last election compared to persons without disabilities. On average, for instance, 8 per cent of the population of persons without disabilities reported it was problematic or very problematic to vote in the last election whereas 38 per cent of persons with disabilities found it was very problematic to vote. Further, 44 per cent of persons with psychosocial disabilities found it was problematic or very problematic to vote in the last election (Figure 223). In 6 out of 9 capital cities in Asia and the Pacific, more than 80 per cent of polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities but in the remaining 3 capital cities, less than 10 per cent of polling stations are accessible.<sup>14</sup> Common voting obstacles reported by persons with disabilities include difficulties in reading the ballot, waiting in

line, finding and entering the polling place, writing on the ballot and communicating with election officials.

**Figure 223. Percentage of persons who found voting problematic in the last election, by psychosocial disability and disability statuses, in 6 countries, in 2021 or latest year available.**

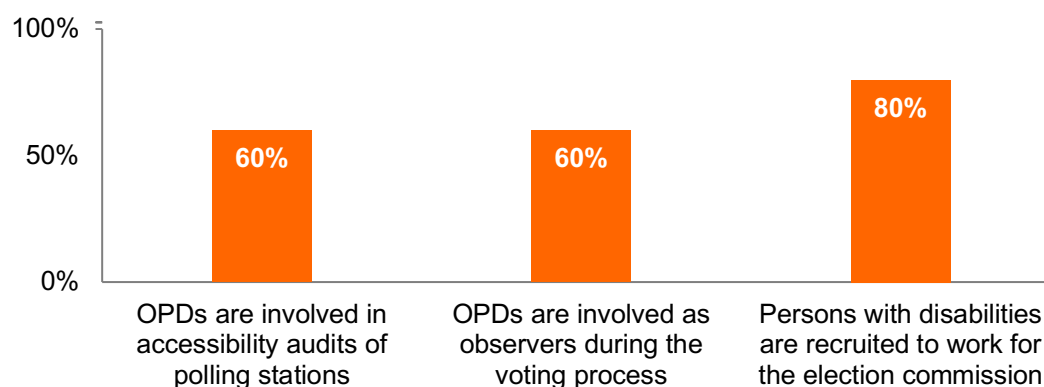


*Note: (MDS) identifies data produced using the Model Disability Survey.*

*Source: WHO (on the basis of data from Model Disability Surveys).*

To better address the needs of persons with disabilities, countries have been increasing their involvement in national voting and election processes. For example, in 80 per cent of countries/territories in Asia and the Pacific, the law requires that persons with disabilities are recruited to work for the election commission; and, in 60 per cent, the law requires that representative organizations of persons with disabilities are involved in accessibility audits of polling stations and are observers during the voting process (Figure 224).

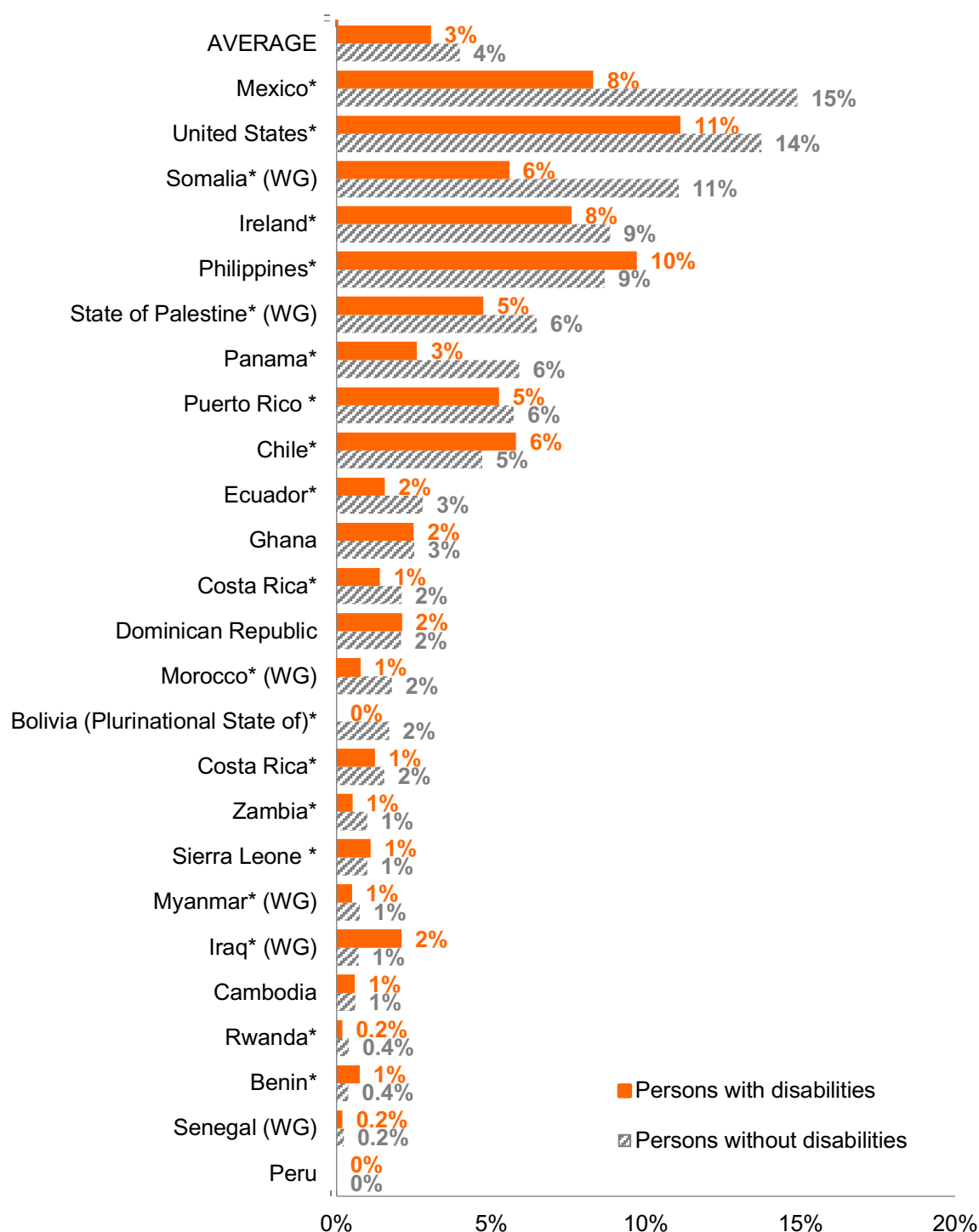
**Figure 224. Percentage of countries with legal requirements for the involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations (OPDs) in various processes relating to elections and voting, in 15 countries/areas in Asia and the Pacific, in 2022.**



Source: ESCAP.<sup>14</sup>

Many persons with disabilities face numerous obstacles in obtaining high-level decision-making roles. Among 25 countries/areas, persons with disabilities are less likely than persons without disabilities to hold a position as a legislator, a senior official or a manager in 18 of these countries/areas (Figure 225). The gaps between persons with and without disabilities are widest in Mexico, Panama and Somalia, where employed persons without disabilities are twice as likely as persons with disabilities to work as legislators, senior officials or managers.

**Figure 225. Percentage of employed persons aged 15 and over who work as legislators, senior officials or managers, by disability status, in 25 countries/areas, in 2021 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.*

*Source: ECLAC,<sup>13</sup> ESCWA and UNDESA (on the basis of data from IPUMS<sup>8</sup>).*

## Summary of findings and the way forward

Public institutions and public services remain largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities, due to lack of accessibility and discrimination. A majority of countries, 77 per cent, offers online government services for persons with disabilities, but only 30 per cent of online governmental portals are accessible for persons with disabilities. Moreover, even when services are offered online, in-person appearance is often required to benefit from the public service, which poses a barrier to many persons with mobility-related disabilities: 53 per cent of countries require an in-person appearance. Data from a limited number of countries suggests that about 15 per cent of persons with disabilities experience discrimination in public services. Public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities is on average 1 per cent of GDP.

Significant progress has been made since 2014 on the provision of online government services for persons with disabilities (from 27 per cent of countries in 2014 to 77 per cent of countries in 2020) and this trend is on track to reach all countries by 2030. Trends since 2014 in public spending on social programmes for persons with disabilities suggest that globally this spending is stagnant.

Barriers to inclusive decision-making for persons with disabilities persist. In various countries, persons with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in the national-level public service personnel, with levels of representation lower than half their share in the national population. About 30 per cent of persons with disabilities find voting problematic or not accessible for them. In various countries, employed persons without disabilities are twice as likely as persons with disabilities to work as legislators, senior officials or managers.

Inclusive institutions and inclusive decision making requires that persons with disabilities can access the premises of these institutions and the places where decisions at governmental and non-governmental levels are made. In 2022, 73 per cent of libraries, 71 per cent of tax offices, 66 per cent of town halls, 63 per cent of governmental ministries, 51 per cent of museums and 48 per cent of non-governmental organizations were accessible for wheelchair users. In the past five years, progress in increasing the accessibility of most of these premises has been slow or stagnant. Town halls would need to become accessible for persons using wheelchairs at a rate 4 times faster, libraries 7 times faster, museums 9 times faster and non-governmental organization 19 times faster than current rates of progress to achieve full accessibility by 2030. Accessibility of tax offices has been deteriorating and this trend needs to be reversed. Significant progress has been made since 2018 in the accessibility of governmental ministries (from 42 per cent in 2018 to 63 per cent in 2022) and these premises are on track to achieve full accessibility for wheelchair users by 2030.

Data on the exposure of persons with disabilities to corruption and bribery is extremely scarce. The limited data available suggests that persons with disabilities are slightly less likely to pay or be asked to

pay a bribe when interacting with government officials. During disasters, conflicts and other emergencies, persons with disabilities encounter bribery when attempting to access services.

As essential steps towards effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels for persons with disabilities and for inclusive decision-making, the actions below are recommended:

**1. Eliminate discriminatory legislation that violates the right of persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, to vote and to participate in all aspects of political and public life.** Adopt legislative measures to ensure that all persons with disabilities can exercise their right to vote and participate in public life, on an equal basis with others. Remove restrictions that impact the political participation of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Engage persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the process of adopting or revising these laws.

**2. Increase the participation of persons with disabilities in national public service.** Introduce and enforce quotas for persons with disabilities, and for women with disabilities. Improve recruitment and retention strategies, including the provision mentorship and training. Remove discriminatory legislation and practices on eligibility to public service.

**3. Support persons with disabilities who stand for political office.** Mandate a certain number of representatives for persons with disabilities in legislatures and government organs. Ensure candidates with disabilities can campaign on an equal basis with others by providing additional support to overcome accessibility barriers or cover disability-related costs. Provide additional support and implement measures for increased participation of women with disabilities as candidates.

**4. Strengthen the skills of persons with disabilities to defend their political rights, including voting and running for public office.** Offer civic education and training on legal rights and national constitutions – these trainings should be developed in consultation with representative organizations of persons with disabilities and be offered in accessible formats for persons with disabilities. Empower persons with psychosocial disabilities, who have been especially marginalized, to advocate for political rights.

**5. Ensure that public institutions and public services are fully accessible to all persons with disabilities.** Make ministries, town halls, other government offices and other public institutions accessible for persons with disabilities, including through the provision of reasonable accommodation upon request. Ensure that online governmental portals are accessible for persons with disabilities, by complying with the W3C guidelines. Make online application for public services possible. Ensure that the mechanisms for reporting discrimination in public institutions and public services are available and accessible to persons with disabilities.

**6. Make the voting process fully accessible for all persons with disabilities.** Make voting registration accessible. Make polling stations and public facilities physically accessible for persons with disabilities

and ensure that alternative methods of voting are available to accommodate the various needs of voters with disabilities. Make remote/virtual voting possible.

**7. Promote an enabling environment for political participation of persons with disabilities.** Engage with media and other stakeholders to show persons with disabilities taking part in political life alongside their peers. Hire persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, as poll workers and election observers. Make all information related to political participation available in accessible formats such as audio, braille, easy-to-understand, large print and sign language.

**8. Prevent, identify and respond to impacts of electoral violence against persons with disabilities.** Electoral violence hinders persons with disabilities from participating in electoral processes. Involve persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and their representative organizations in the design and implementation of strategies to prevent electoral violence. Train election officials and law enforcement officers to identify and respond to electoral violence against persons with disabilities, particularly against indigenous persons with disabilities and women with disabilities. Develop mechanisms to report and monitor electoral violence against persons with disabilities.

**9. Ensure the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the development and implementation of anti-corruption programmes.** Develop complaint mechanisms to report corruption and bribery in consultation with representative organizations of persons with disabilities and make these mechanisms accessible to all persons with disabilities. In particular, information on these mechanisms should be made available in accessible formats, such as Braille and easy-to-understand.

**10. Keep adequate levels of public spending and government expenditures for disability inclusion.** Provide adequate funding to expand accessibility for persons with disabilities of public buildings, spaces and services, support the implementation of inclusive education of persons with disabilities (see chapter on Goal 4) and cover disability benefits to support the independent living and inclusion of persons with disabilities (see chapter on Goal 1).



## Providing legal identity for all, including birth registration (target 16.9)

This section addresses the situation and progress for persons with disabilities vis-à-vis target 16.9, which aims at providing legal identity to all by 2030, including birth registration. Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifies children with disabilities shall be registered immediately after birth and have the right to a name and a nationality.

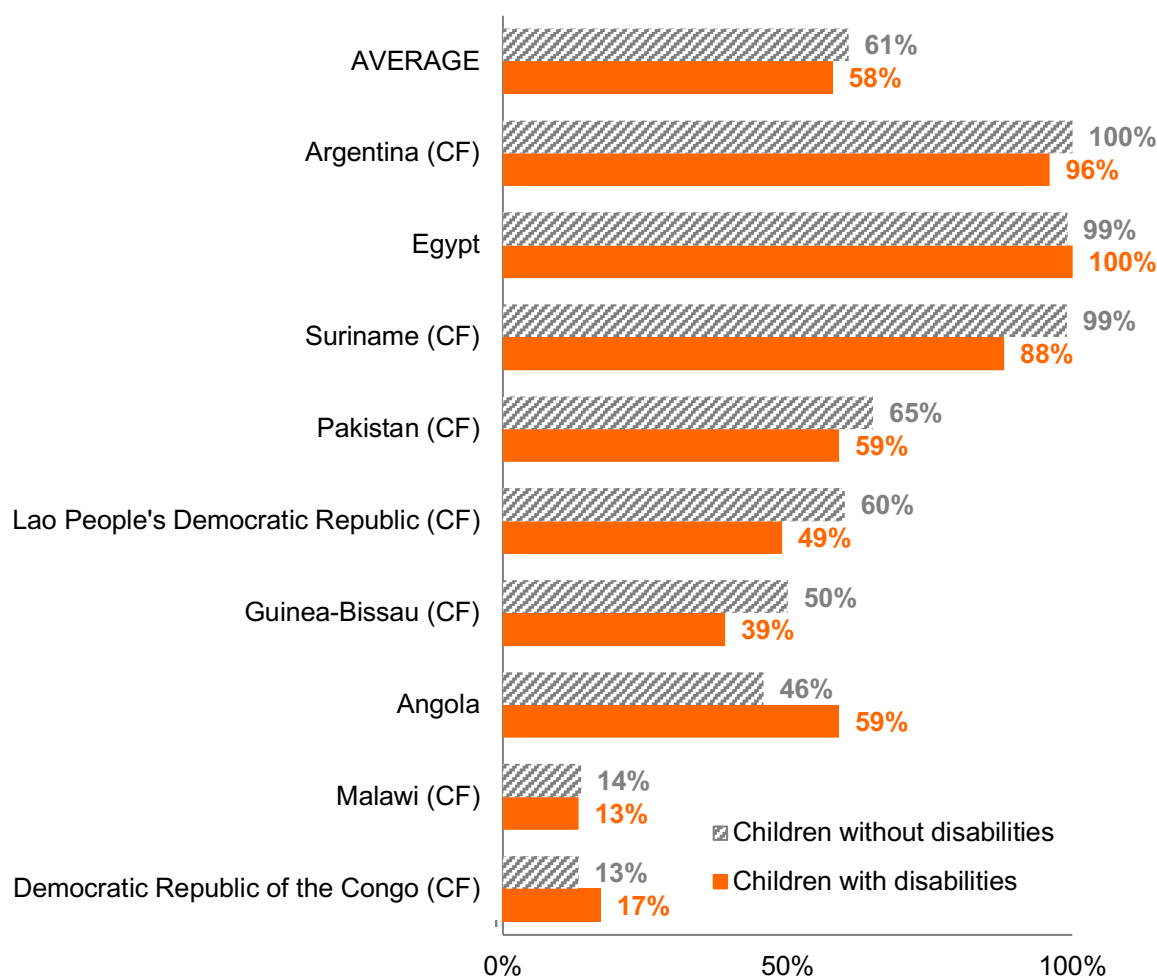
Birth registration, the official recording of a child's birth by the government, establishes the existence of the child under the law and provides the foundation for safeguarding many of the child's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Due to stigma, families with children with disabilities sometimes fail to register them. This could have serious adverse implications for them in the realizations of their rights and entitlements.

### Current situation and progress so far

Birth registration for children with disabilities is typically ensured by general laws making birth registration compulsory for all. But due to stigma and negative stereotypes, families sometimes opt to hide family members with disabilities and do not register them at birth. Available data from nine countries shows that on average fewer children with disabilities, 58 per cent, were registered at birth than children without disabilities, 61 per cent (Figure 226). However, the gaps between children with and without disabilities vary across countries. Children with disabilities were less likely to be registered in six of these countries and more likely to be registered in 3 of these countries. Guinea-Bissau and Suriname showed the largest gaps between children with and without disabilities, 11 percentage points, with children with disabilities being less likely to be registered than others in both countries. Since hidden children with disabilities would not be counted in statistical surveys, it is possible that the gaps may be higher than shown in available data.

To address the lower birth registration among children with disabilities, some countries have enacted disability-specific laws to reaffirm the right of children with disabilities to be registered at birth;<sup>570</sup> others have conducted national surveys to understand the challenges that parents of infants with disabilities face in registering them at birth;<sup>571</sup> others have invested in online,<sup>572</sup> mobile registration programmes,<sup>571</sup> or registration by SMS.<sup>573</sup> Online, SMS and mobile registration can be particularly useful to increase the registration of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas, where parents may have challenges travelling to registration centres and may be more prone to register the birth of their infant within their communities or the comfort of their homes.

**Figure 226. Percentage of children with disabilities who have been registered at birth, in 9 countries, in 2020 or latest year available.**



*Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. Data from Angola covers children and youths under 18 years of age; data from Argentina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Pakistan and Suriname covers children aged 2 to 5 years; and data from Egypt covers children aged 0 to 4 years.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from DHS<sup>6</sup>) and UNICEF (2021).<sup>46</sup>*

More progress will be needed to achieve target 16.9 for persons with disabilities by 2030. For example, Angola, DR Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Lao PDR, Malawi and Pakistan will have to increase the birth registration rate for persons with disabilities by 3 to 6 percentage points every year till 2030 in order to ensure that all children with disabilities are registered by 2030. To eliminate the gap between children with and without disabilities in birth registration rates, Guinea-Bissau, Lao PDR, Pakistan and Suriname will have to decrease the gap by 1 percentage point every year till 2030.

## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The disruptions caused by lockdowns and social restrictions resulted in declines in birth registration during COVID-19. Only a minority of countries were able to maintain service continuity for birth registrations during the COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>574</sup> Many civil registration offices either closed or kept open with social distancing measures in place. Few countries established business continuity plans or developed strategies to deal with the backlog when restrictions were lifted.

As infants with disabilities have been at higher risk to die from COVID-19 (see chapter on Goal 3), parents of infants with disabilities may have been particularly reticent to risk COVID-19 exposure when travelling to and attending civil registration offices to register their child. The pandemic is likely to have increase the gap in birth registration between children with and without disabilities.

### Summary of findings and the way forward

Birth registration makes children with disabilities visible and empowers them to access education, justice and health services. Birth certificates also protect children with disabilities against early marriage (see chapter on SDG 5) and child labour (see chapter on SDG 8). In some countries, a large percentage of children with disabilities remains unregistered and at higher rates than children without disabilities. Stigma is often the barrier.

Faster progress will be needed to achieve target 16.9 for persons with disabilities by 2030. Countries with birth registration for children with disabilities lower than 50 per cent as of 2023 will have to increase the birth registration rate for persons with disabilities by 7 or more percentage points every year till 2030 in order to ensure that all children with disabilities are registered by 2030. For some countries this means rates of progress will need to be at least twice the current rates of progress. Countries where children with disabilities are being left behind in registration may need targeted measures to address the gap.

The following targeted initiatives can promote the registration of children with disabilities:

**1. Combat stigma and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities.** Use the media to portray positive images of persons with disabilities. Raise awareness among parents of infants with disabilities of the importance of registering their birth. Involve persons with disabilities in designing awareness campaigns.

**2. Conduct studies to identify barriers to register children with disabilities** and target efforts to address those barriers.

**3. Provide online, SMS and mobile birth registration.** Remote and mobile birth registration will facilitate the process for all parents, and mobile registrations may especially help parents of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas.

**4. Provide disability training for officers responsible for the birth registration process,** both in civil registration offices and in health facilities, to combat negative attitudes towards disability.

**5. Make contingency plans for maintaining birth registration in crisis situations and emergencies, like pandemics.** To ensure operational continuity of birth registration of children with disabilities during crises and emergencies, make contingency plans to meet demand for registration during the crisis and to deal with possible backlogs after the crisis. Invest in online and SMS services for birth registration and have contingency plans to move fully remotely in case of emergency situations leading to lockdowns. Involve families of children with disabilities in designing these contingency plans.

## Ensuring public access to information (target 16.10)

This section will focus on ensuring public access to information for persons with disabilities (target 16.10). Public access to information can be defined as seeking, receiving and imparting information held by public bodies. Information can be transmitted in various ways, in digital or hard formats.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the right to seek and receive information. In line with this right, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: (i) have access to information (Article 9); and (ii) can exercise the right of freedom to seek and receive information on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice (Article 21).

Another important legal landmark is the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities (2013), which addresses the barriers that persons with visual impairments face in accessing published works by introducing limitations and exceptions to copyright rules in order to permit reproduction, distribution and the availability of published works in formats designed to be accessible to persons with visual impairments or print disabilities, and by permitting the exchange of these works across borders by organizations that serve these persons.

This section presents data and evidence depicting the current situation and trends in access to public information for persons with disabilities, discusses current practices and concludes with recommendations to achieve this target by 2030 for persons with disabilities.

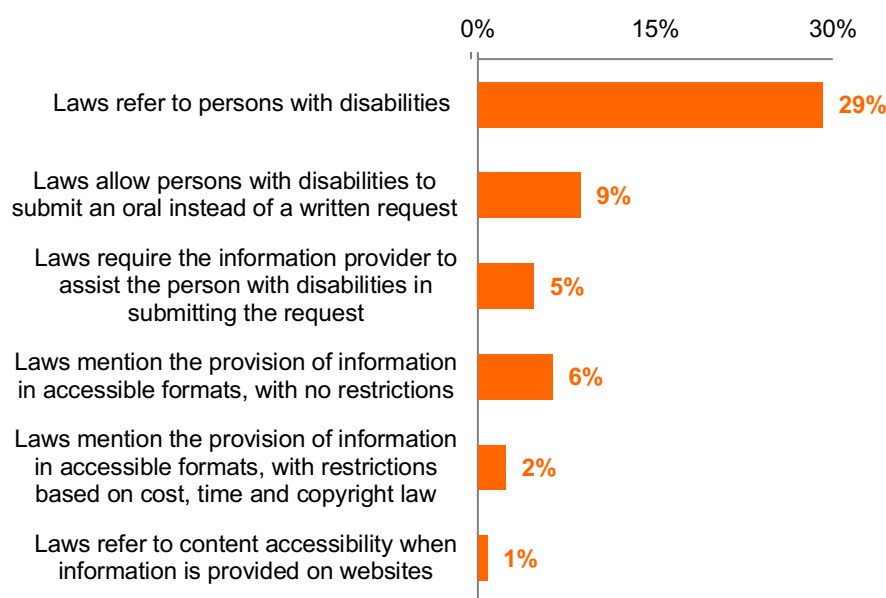
## Current situation and progress so far

For many persons with disabilities, accessing public information is a path full of obstacles, with many countries lacking legal requirements for information to be shared in formats and languages accessible to persons with disabilities.

SDG indicator 16.10.2 monitors the number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information. These guarantees are often regulated by national laws on access to information, but the rights of persons with disabilities are absent in most of these laws and, when reference is made to persons with disabilities and accessibility, the scope is limited. Among 127 countries with laws on access to information, only 29 per cent of countries refer to persons with disabilities and their rights in these laws (Figure 227). With regard to making a request for access to information, only 9 per cent of countries allow applicants with disabilities to submit an oral request where a written request would normally be required. Additionally, only 5 per cent of countries require the information provider to assist the persons with disabilities in submitting the request when their disability prevents them from doing so in a manner prescribed by the law. In terms of the provision of information in accessible formats, only 6 per cent of countries mention the provision of information to persons with disabilities in an accessible format, and another 2 per cent of countries mention this provision but allow

for restrictions in the provision of accessible formats based on cost, time and copyright laws. Only 1 per cent of countries refers to content accessibility for persons with disabilities when information is provided on websites.

**Figure 227. Percentage of countries that include provisions for persons with disabilities and for accessibility in their laws on access to information, in 127 countries, in 2020.**



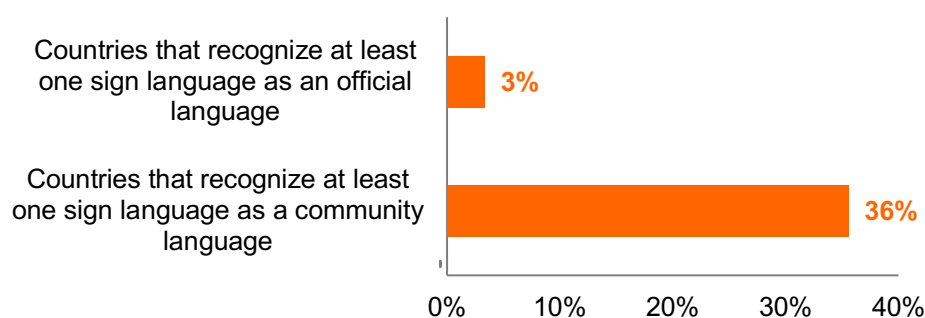
Source: UNESCO (2023).<sup>575</sup>

Public information presented in national government online portals is largely not accessible: 63 per cent of online national governmental portals worldwide do not comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (see chapter on target 9.c and chapter on targets 16.6 and 16.7). Africa has the largest percentage of countries with governmental websites which are not accessible for persons with disabilities (87 per cent) and Europe the lowest (30 per cent). Moreover, lack of access to ICTs can also be a barrier to access public information for persons with disabilities, as public information is increasingly shared digitally. Many ICTs are not affordable and not accessible for persons with disabilities (see chapter on target 9.c).

To ensure equal access to public information, information needs to be presented in languages used by persons with disabilities. Yet, in many countries, public information is typically not made available in sign languages. Among 90 countries, only 3 per cent recognize at least one sign language as an official language; and only 36 per cent recognize at least one sign language as a community language (Figure 228).

Barriers to persons with disabilities persist in public services that are often used to access public information. For example, a survey of 131 public libraries in 15 countries worldwide, indicated that only 49 per cent of libraries have a local policy on accessibility for persons with disabilities, only 15 per cent have a budget for accessibility, and only 10 per cent have all their staff trained on accessibility (with 37 per cent indicating that no staff has been trained on accessibility). Accessible features are more prevalent, with 85 per cent of the libraries having features to make them accessible to persons with physical disabilities, but only 53 per cent for persons with sensory disabilities and 57 per cent for persons with cognitive disabilities. Overall, 59 per cent of these libraries cooperate with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, and many libraries provide dedicated services for persons with disabilities to access information, including for blind persons and persons with visual impairments (42 per cent of libraries), for persons with disabilities who are homebound (40 per cent of libraries), for persons with mobility impairments (37 per cent of libraries), for persons with print disabilities (34 per cent of libraries), for deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments (27 per cent of libraries), for persons with autism (25 per cent of libraries), for persons who have difficulty holding a book (15 per cent of libraries), for persons with mental or psychosocial disabilities (15 per cent of libraries) and for the deafblind (9 per cent of libraries).

**Figure 228. Percentage of countries that recognize sign languages as community languages and as official languages, in 90 countries, in 2023.**

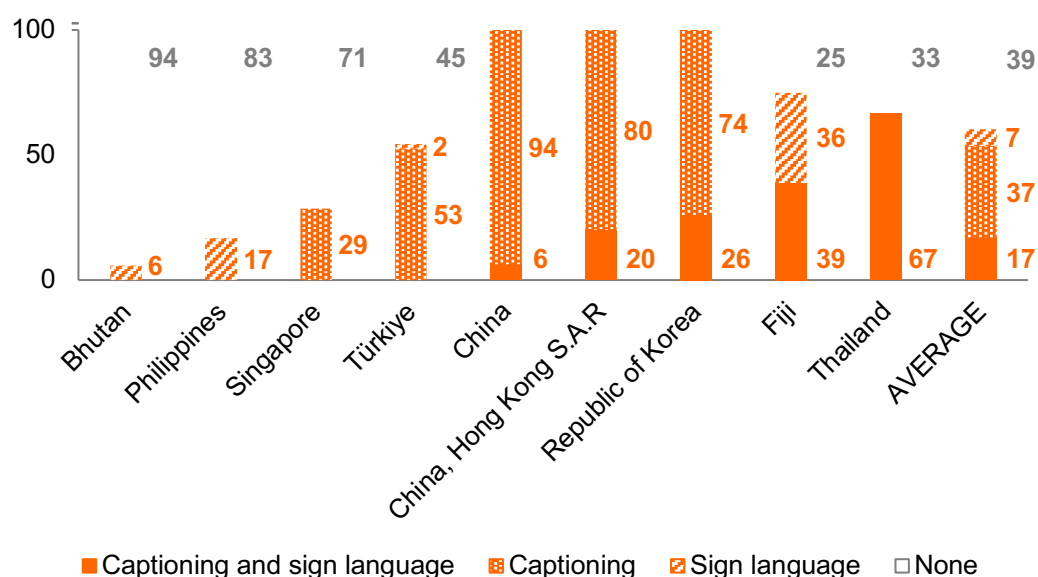


Source: UNESCO World Atlas of Languages.<sup>576</sup>

Many national public TV channels also lack features to make them accessible to persons with disabilities. In 9 countries or territories in Asia and the Pacific, on average, only 17 per cent of news in national public TV channels include both captioning and sign language, 37 per cent include captioning only, 7 per cent include sign language only and 39 per cent do not include any of these accessibility features (Figure 229). The availability of these accessibility services in news programmes of national public TV vary from country to country. In Bhutan, only 6 per cent of news include accessibility features, and the only feature available is sign language. In Thailand 67 per cent of news include both captioning and sign language. In China, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) and in the Republic of Korea, all news include captioning.

Moreover, persons with disabilities tend to have less access to sources of information which can act as alternatives or complements to public information. In particular, since persons with disabilities tend to have fewer financial resources and are less likely to be employed than others (see chapters on Goal 1 and Goal 8), access to information may not be affordable to them, resulting in lower access. For instance, in 4 countries in Africa, on average, only 32 per cent of persons with disabilities can afford a newspaper compared to 41 per cent of persons without disabilities (Figure 230). In all four countries a lower percentage of persons with disabilities than persons without disabilities can afford a newspaper, with the widest gap observed in Lesotho (15 percentage points). Differences between men and women with disabilities in these countries are negligible (Figure 231), but marked differences exist between persons with disabilities living in rural versus urban areas, with a higher percentage of persons with disabilities in urban areas (50 per cent on average) than in rural areas (34 per cent on average) being able to afford a newspaper (Figure 232).

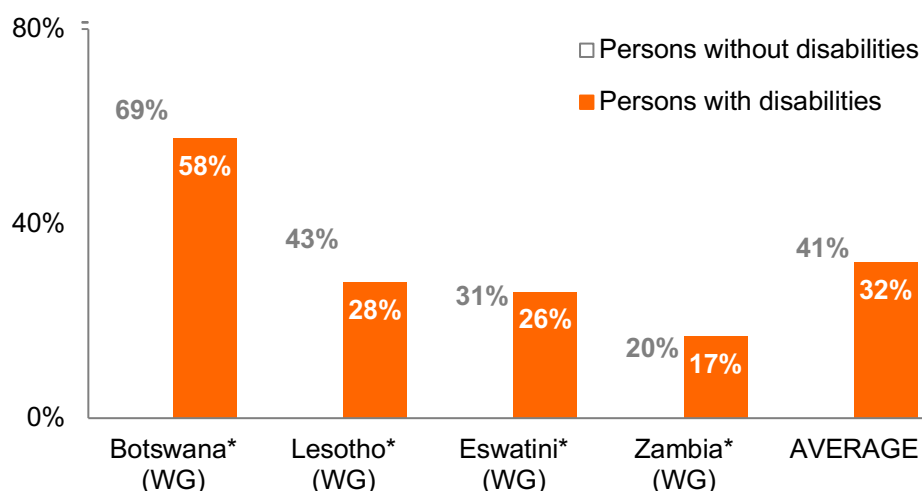
**Figure 229. Percentage of duration of news programmes of national public TV channels that contain captioning and sign language, in 9 countries or areas in Asia and the Pacific, in 2022 or latest year available.**



Source: ESCAP.<sup>14</sup>



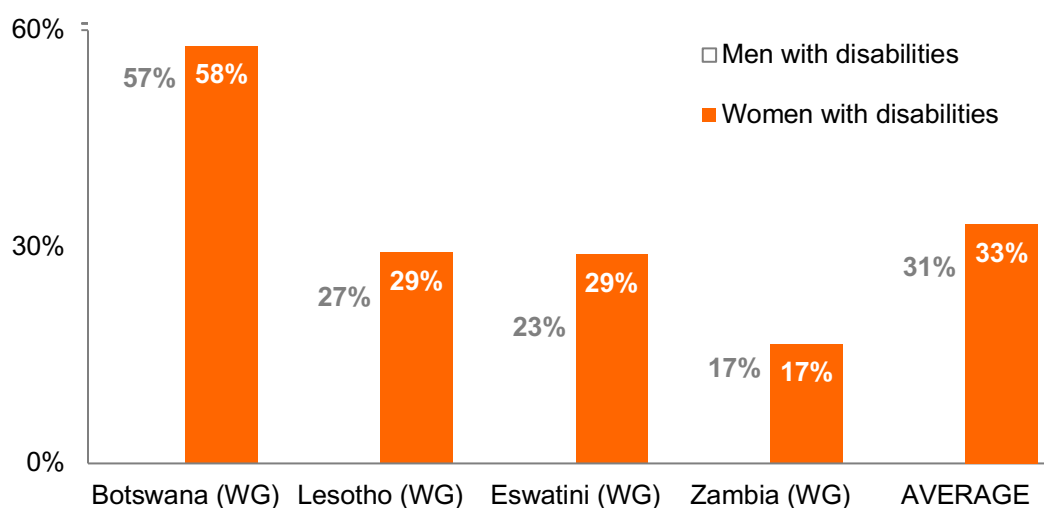
**Figure 230. Percentage of persons who can afford a newspaper, by disability status, in 4 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the difference between persons with and without disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5%.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

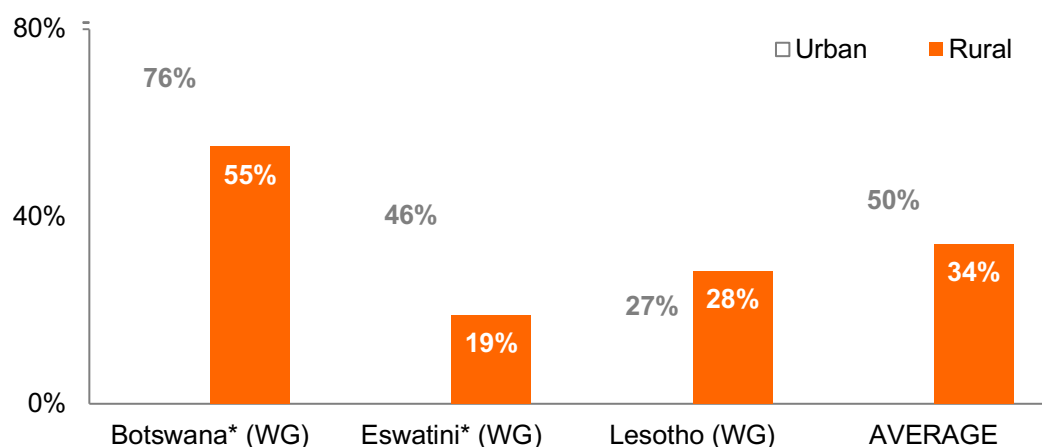
**Figure 231. Percentage of persons with disabilities who can afford a newspaper, by sex, in 4 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the difference between men and women with disabilities is statistically significant at the level of 5%.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

**Figure 232. Percentage of persons with disabilities who can afford a newspaper, by disability status, in 3 countries, in 2015 or latest year available.**



*Note: (WG) identifies data produced using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the difference between persons with disabilities in rural and urban areas is statistically significant at the level of 5%.*

*Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from SINTEF<sup>9</sup>).*

## Summary of findings and the way forward

Persons with disabilities face a number of barriers in pursuing equal access to public information. National laws on access to public information do not always include the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities and lack accessibility provisions: only 6 per cent of countries mention the provision of public information in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, with no restrictions; and only 1 per cent of countries refer to content accessibility for persons with disabilities when the information is provided online. Moreover, public information is not always available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities, such as easy-to-understand and sign language. One barrier to a wider use of sign language in the provision of public information is the lower number of countries that recognize sign languages as official languages: only 3 per cent of countries recognize at least one sign language as an official language.

Accessibility policies and features are also lacking in public bodies that typically provide public information. For instance, only 49 per cent of public libraries worldwide have a policy on accessibility for persons with disabilities and only 15 per cent have a budget for accessibility; in Asia and the Pacific, only 17 per cent of news in national public TV channels include both captioning and sign language.

One barrier to persons with disabilities to access information in general is the lack of financial resources. For example, in some countries in Africa, less than 30 per cent of persons with disabilities can afford a newspaper, with persons with disabilities in rural areas being less likely to be able to afford a newspaper.

To enhance access to public information for persons with disabilities, these issues need to be addressed, namely by the following recommended actions:

**1. Adopt or revise current laws on access to information to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities.** Countries should take steps towards an inclusive and comprehensive legislative framework containing minimum mandatory accessibility standards that ensure access to public information for all persons with disabilities, without discrimination on any ground including but not limited to type of disability, geographical location, financial means and language capabilities.

**2. Raise awareness and conduct trainings on the rights of persons with disabilities among staff involved in access to public information.** Train public employees on disability and accessibility to improve access and accessibility of information. Training modules should discuss accessibility standards and available tools and methods that could be utilized for enhancing the accessibility of the information. Involved persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the design and implementation of awareness raising campaigns and trainings.

**3. Allocate adequate human and financial resources to ensure accessibility of public information.** Develop and accessibility budget for public bodies involved in access to public information and hire the necessary human resources to make access to public information fully accessible to all persons with disabilities.

**4. Monitor and evaluate access and accessibility of public information to persons with disabilities.** Conduct periodic surveys and collect feedback from persons with disabilities to understand and overcome the obstacles they face in accessing public information.